

**SEX PISTOLS**

**NO FUTURE FOR WHO?**

**THE POGUES**

**40 YEARS ON THE LASH**



**THE  
COMPLETE  
FANDANGO!**

# QUEEN

**BRIAN AND ROGER ON  
THE SONGS BEHIND THE STORIES**

**PLUS**

**CHET BAKER  
JEFF BRIDGES  
ALABASTER  
DEPLUME  
THE DOOBIE  
BROTHERS  
GUIDED BY VOICES**

**144  
REVIEWS**

ALISON KRAUSS  
KRAFTWERK  
THE BEACH BOYS  
SLY STONE  
& MORE

**ALAN  
SPARHAWK**  
LIFE AFTER LOW

**THE BEATLES**  
THE ART OF  
GETTING BETTER

**JAPANESE  
BREAKFAST**  
"SO MANY IDEAS.  
SO LITTLE TIME."

**DIONNE  
WARWICK**  
"DON'T MAKE ME OVER!"

**RICK BUCKLER**  
FIRE AND SKILL

**LED ZEPPELIN**  
RANKED!

**PRINCE, RANDY,  
RY, VAN & LENNY  
WARONKER!**





# CARGO COLLECTIVE

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## CLIPPING

**DEAD CHANNEL SKY**  
SUB POP 2LP / CD

Clipping latest, Dead Channel Sky, fuses hip-hop and cyberpunk into an adventurous album filled with instantly catchy beats and deftly rapped tales of dystopia, technology, Afrofuturism and beyond.



## THROWING MUSES

**MOONLIGHT CONCESSIONS**  
FIRE RECORDS LP / CD

'Moonlight Concessions' goes back to basics, a return for Throwing Muses to their esoteric off-kilter best, courtesy of Kristin's pin-sharp sketches and their suitably abrasive musical arrangements. "One of America's finest guitar bands." The Quietus



## ANDY BELL

**PINBALL WANDERER**  
SONIC CATHEDRAL LP / CD

The third solo album by Andy Bell (Ride, Oasis) is an otherworldly collection of intergalactic wizardry that mixes psychedelic melodies, Can-via-The Stone Roses grooves and Arthur Russell-style experimental textures.



## IMMERSION / SUSS

**NANOCLUSTER VOL. 3**  
SWIM LP / CD

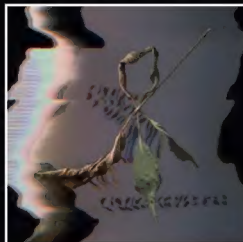
Volume 3 of Colin Newman & Malka Spigel's Nanocluster collaboration series is a meeting of Immersions European post-punk electronic discipline & the new world, Americana cinematic soundscapes from the American ambient country band SUSS.



## COCOROSIE

**LITTLE DEATH WISHES**  
JOYFUL NOISE LP / CD

On their 8th long player, experimental pop sister duo Cocorosie tell a kaleidoscopic story of the generational hardship of women & the shattered realities of their lives, the precarious & precious nature of being human, of being done wrong by love, & a final wish to be unbroken.



## T. GOWDY

**TRILL SCAN**  
CONSTELLATION LP / CD

Gowdy melds his acclaimed flickerpulse techno with Medieval music tropes and vocals for a warm expansion of his gritty psychoacoustic IDM into more humanistic transcendentalist territory. 180gLP includes art print.



## JONI VOID

**EVERY LIFE IS A LIGHT**  
CONSTELLATION LP / CD

Void's most inviting album of concrete-pop to date, challenging the AI-enshittification of lofi/chill with realworld context and materials, channelling Shibuya-Kei, 90s-era Too Pure electronica, and more. 180gLP includes art print.



## THE SURE FIRE SOUL ENSEMBLE

**GEMINI**  
COLEMIN RECORDS LP / CD

San Diego's nine piece instrumental combo is back and steering their "introspective party music" into fresh sonic realms. 'Gemini' features their breakbeat-heavy brand of funk-soul mixed with new spiritually-leaning jazz sounds.



## HOUSE OF ALL

**HOUSE OF ALL SOULS**  
TINY GLOBAL PRODUCTIONS LP / CD

HOA's third album breaks new ground with a third ex-Fall drummer, and majestic set of peerless songs and performances far beyond what fans have a right to accept.



## DA GOOGIE + CARA TIVEY

**THE GOLDEN THREAD**  
TINY GLOBAL PRODUCTIONS LP / CD

The debut from My Bloody Valentine's Deb Googie + Billy Bragg cohort Cara Tivey is a unique blend of dub's openness, claustrophobia-inducing chills and stabs of sheer beauty. An immediate groundbreaking classic.



## JEFFREY LEWIS

**THE EVEN MORE FREEWHEELIN'**  
JEFFREY LEWIS  
BLANC RECORDS LP / CD

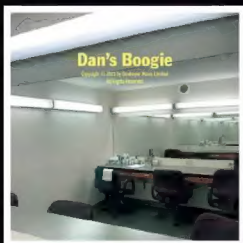
Poetic garage-folk-rock from NYC, produced by Roger Moutenot (Yo La Tengo, Lou Reed!) "Jeffrey is the best pure songwriter I know of" - David Berman.



## PETER HARRIS + FRITZ CATLIN

**LEE SCRATCH PERRY**  
MERCY  
DASH THE HENGE LP

One of the most compelling and complex releases of Lee 'Scratch' Perry's post-Black Ark canon, Mercy is the fruit of a long and complex working process that has yielded exceptional results.



## DESTROYER

**DAN'S BOOGIE**  
MERGE RECORDS LP / CD

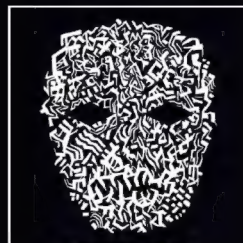
"Dan Bejar's marvelously inscrutable songwriting reaches beyond meaning." —Pitchfork



## THE TUBS

**COTTON CROWN**  
TROUBLE IN MIND LP / CD

Second album from this London group is a sublime nine song flyby offsetting lyrical bleakness with joyous, hook-laden blasts of pop perfection - a "level up" album positioning them for indie rock greatness.



## YOUNG WIDOWS

**POWER SUCKER**  
TEMPORARY RESIDENCE LP / CD

The first new album in 11 years from one of noise-rock's most important bands is every bit as shocking and intense as anything the influential trio has ever made.



## DERYA YILDIRIM & GRUP SIMSEK

**YARIN YOKSA**  
BIG CROWN RECORDS LP / CD

Produced by Grammy Nominated producer Leon Michels. The show stopping intensity of Derya backed by the psychedelic soul of Grup Simsek has yielded a stand out record that challenges genre with a broad appeal & a powerful message.

AN AMALGAMATION OF RECORD SHOPS AND LABELS DEDICATED TO BRINGING YOU NEW MUSIC  
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LONDON ♦ MEMPHIS ♦ SAN JOSE

MAY 2025

ISSUE 378



“Being able to find great songs had a lot to do with my success.”

DIONNE WARWICK, P56

## FEATURES

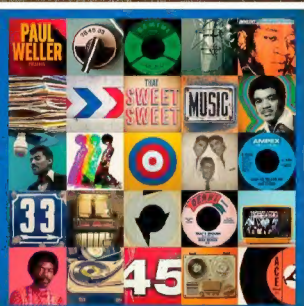
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# MOJO

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- 16 THE DOOBIE BROTHERS** Bringing all epochs of their storied band together, the Doobies convene for brand new LP, *Walk This Road*. "It's still fun," they say.
- 18 RECORD STORE DAY 2025** It's here again, with a plethora of tempting limited-edition vinyl treats. As well as our pick of over 400 releases, Jeff Bridges gets involved – but what's The Dude got to do with it?
- 20 ALABASTER DEPLUME** The sax-blowing man born Gus Fairbairn talks confidential with us. Just don't ask him if he fancies an omelette – he's got martial arts skills!
- 22 ATLANTIC RECORDS** A giant new photos-plus-essays book celebrates 75 years of the great American label that brought us the best in R&B, soul, jazz, rock and beyond.

## MOJO FILTER

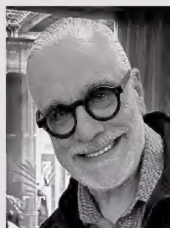
- 82 NEW ALBUMS** The gospel according to Annie & The Caldwell, plus Greentea Peng, Alison Krauss, The Horrors and The Waterboys.
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## THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDE...



**Ian Leslie**  
Ian is the author of acclaimed books on psychology and behaviour, including *Curious*, about the desire to learn, and *How To Disagree*. He has written for the *New Statesman*, *Financial Times* and *The Economist* and is the author of Substack newsletter, *The Ruffian*. His book, *John & Paul: A Love Story In Songs*, is extracted on p44.



**Derek Ridgers**  
In the late '70s, Derek began photographing punks, skinheads, rockers and New Romantics at shows. Documenting British style and culture in the late-20th century, his pictures can currently be seen at the National Portrait Gallery and Tate Modern. On p73, Derek recalls his art school days with Freddie Mercury.



**Pak Bae**  
Making his name in street photography in London from 2017 but now based in Seoul, Pak Bae's meticulously crafted, distinctly cinematic photography has appeared in *Vogue*, *Esquire* and *GQ* and in collaboration with brands including Nike and Gucci. His portrait of Japanese Breakfast's Michelle Zauner is on p41.



(( SOUND CRASH ))

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PRESENTS

HOLIDAYS IN THE SUN

STEVE JONES - PAUL COOK - GLEN MATLOCK

PLUS  
SPECIAL  
GUESTS

SEX PISTOLS

the stranglers

FEATURING

FRANK CARTER

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Ocean Colour Scene + FROM THE JAM

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## SUMMER 2025 CONCERT SERIES IN CASTLE PARK, COLCHESTER



COLCHESTER  
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FRI 15 AUG  
**BUSTED**  
SCOUTING FOR GIRLS

SAT 16 AUG  
**CRAIG DAVID  
PRESENTS TS5**  
WES NELSON & MORE

SUN 17 AUG  
**UB40 FT  
ALI CAMPBELL**  
BITTY MCLEAN, ASWAD  
DAVID RODIGAN & DON LETTS & MORE

THU 14 AUG  
**SMASHING  
PUMPKINS**  
SKUNK ANANSIE  
WHITE LIES

THU 21 AUG  
**TEXAS**  
NATALIE IMBRUGLIA  
RIANNE DOWNEY

FRI 22 AUG  
**JAMES**  
HAPPY MONDAYS  
LIGHTNING SEEDS + THE WAEVE

SAT 23 AUG  
**MADNESS**  
THE ZUTONS  
THE SKINTS + THE BEAT FT RANKIN JNR

**PLUS MORE  
COMING  
SOON**



# SONGS *from the* COZINTY HELL

THE POGUES,  
THE DUBLINERS,  
THE MARY  
WALLOPERS,  
LANKUM,  
LISA O'NEILL  
AND MORE



## 1 THE POGUES THE SICK BED OF CÚCHULAINN

Since we're celebrating the 40th anniversary of *Rum Sodomy & The Lash*, where better to start than with that album's rousing opener? Irish myth, radical politics, a trail of picturesque devastation stretching across Europe, and a high-velocity tune that sounds like it's been around for centuries... The essence of The Pogues in three incredible minutes.

Written by Shane Patrick Lysaght MacGowan. 1985 Warner Music UK Ltd. Licensed courtesy of Warner Music UK LTD. From *Rum Sodomy & The Lash*. GBAHT0105482



## 2 THE MEN THEY COULDN'T HANG IRONMASTERS

Named by Shane MacGowan, and with Pogues roadie Cush a key founding member, The Men... were the second-biggest folk-punk band of the '80s. And as this new live version of one of their greatest songs – a Thatcher-bashing protest anthem from 1985 – proves, their fury and energy is heroically undimmed.

Written by Paul Simmonds, Philip Odgers, Stefan Cush, Jon Odgers. Kassner Associated Publishers Ltd. Recorded live at the Craufurd Arms 2024. Released March 2025 on CD/DVD via Secret Records. ISRC: GBFD2500046. www.secretrecordslimited.com



## 3 THE WALKER ROADERS

### THERE MUST BE LESS TO LIFE THAN THIS

The Walker Roaders are Pogues accordion maestro James Fearnley plus two mainstays of American Celtic punk, Flogging Molly's Ted Hutt and the Dropkick Murphys' Marc Orrell. This 2024 gem was inspired by some Scottish wildmen Fearnley squatted with in the '70s.

Written by James Fearnley, Ted Hutt and Marc Orrell. Published by Wardlaw Music (PRS), Sentric (ASCAP), and Marc Orrell Music (ASCAP). ©&©2024 Ginger Man Records ISRC: QMFMF2375189. walkerroaders.com



## 4 THE MARY WALLOPERS

### EILEEN ÓG

While plenty of new Irish folk acts take inspiration from The Pogues, it's Dundalk's Mary Wallopers who most obviously channel their penchant for punk mayhem. Exhibit A: their tearaway rendering of this *fin de siècle* trinket by Percy French. Compare and contrast with Lankum's 2019 version of the same song, using its alternate title *The Pride Of Petravore*.

Written by Percy French. Produced by Chris Barry. Publisher Copyright Control. ISRC: UK9AV2201329 www.marywallopers.com



## 9 THE SPOOK OF THE THIRTEENTH LOCK

### THE BRUTAL HERE AND NOW

The early 21st century Irish band's name refers to a canalside ghost story, and there's certainly something uncanny about this track from 2012. Hypnotic yet sprightly, *The Brutal Here And Now* builds and builds into a kind of post-rock reel. Once heard, it'll haunt you indefinitely.

Written by The Spook Of The Thirteenth Lock. ©Transduction Records 2012. ISRC IE-BJB-11-00009. thirteenthlock.net



## 10 JOHN FRANCIS FLYNN

### DIRTY OLD TOWN

Another voice who'll be heard on the impending *Rum Sodomy & The Lash* tour, Flynn's version of the Ewan MacColl classic is markedly different to The Pogues' take. "My favourite version is MacColl's," Flynn said in 2023. "It's so sombre... I feel it's a love song for Dublin when I sing it."

Written by Ewan MacColl. ©2023 River Lea Recordings. Traditional Published by Glenwood Music Corp. (ASCAP) ISRC No. GB-CVZ-23-00167. Licensed courtesy of River Lea Recordings. www.riverlearecordings.com

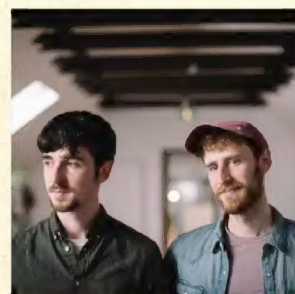


## 11 LANKUM

### THE OLD MAIN DRAG

Members of Lankum will also be on the tour, with this haunting rethink of one of Shane MacGowan's greatest songs already in their repertoire. "It's how tradition is supposed to work," says Jem Finer. "You take something from the past, rework and reconfigure it, and pass it on again."

Written by Shane MacGowan. ©2018 Lankum under exclusive licence to Rough Trade Records Limited. Published by Universal Music Publishing Limited. ISRC No. GB-CVZ-25-00078. Licensed courtesy of Rough Trade Records Limited. By arrangement with Beggars Group Media Limited. www.roughtrade.com



## 12 YE VAGABONDS

### THE BOTHY LADS

Brothers Diarmuid and Brian Mac Gloinn, from Carlow, have seen their acoustic folk land in some unlikely places – not least a collaboration with Boygenius on a version of trad ballad *The Parting Glass* in 2023. This delicately powerful take on an old Scottish song is a B-side from 2021 – a bothy being a basic shelter found in remote areas.

Traditional/Brian Mac Gloinn, Diarmuid Mac Gloinn. ©2021 River Lea Recordings. Traditional Published by Copyright Control. ISRC No. GB-CVZ-20-00108. Licensed courtesy of River Lea Recordings. www.riverlearecordings.com



**T**HERE'S A GREAT SHANE MacGOWAN QUOTE FROM 2012 that kicks off our Pogues feature on page 62 this issue. "The energy of punk rock was already in Irish music," he tells Andrew Perry. "When I was a kid, I saw The Dubliners, The Clancy Brothers – it was all around."

That's the spirit we've tried to tap on *Songs From The County Hell*. For this latest, and maybe rowdiest, MOJO compilation, we've followed the folk-punk energies of The Pogues backwards and forwards in time, honouring and upending traditions and creating new ones as they go. There are essential tracks from The Pogues, contemporaries like The Men They Couldn't Hang, and heroes like the aforementioned Dubliners and Clancys. But we've also found room for a much younger generation of Irish musicians, many of whom pay explicit homage to The Pogues by reinventing Shane MacGowan songs that are now as timeless and intoxicating as the traditionals he loved himself.

The ghosts are rattling at the door. The devil's in the chair. Take one more drop of poison and crank this one up loud.



#### 7 LISA O'NEILL LULLABY OF LONDON

When Fearnley, Spider Stacy and Jem Finer resurrect The Pogues for a *Rum Sodomy & The Lash* tribute tour in May, one of their vocalists will be the exceptional O'Neill, who sang Fairytale Of New York at Shane MacGowan's funeral. Hopefully she'll be allowed to play this – her version of a highlight from *If I Should Fall From Grace With God*.

Written by Shane MacGowan. ©2018 River Lea Recordings. Published by Universal Music Publishing Limited. ISRC No. GB-CVZ-18-00092. Licensed courtesy of River Lea Recordings. www.riverlearecordings.com



#### 6 NYAH FEARTIES RED KOLA

Built around two busking brothers from Lugton, near Kilmarnock, the Nyah Fearties were a frenzied Scottish analogue to The Pogues, who seized the band's attention by playing outside their favoured Camden pub, The Devonshire, in January 1986. Pogues support slots followed at the Hammersmith Palais and in Europe, as well as five albums; Red Kola dates from a 1993 EP. The Wiseman Brothers can currently be found playing as Junkman's Choir.

Written by D.Wiseman/A.Henry/S.Wiseman. nyahfearties.bandcamp.com



#### 5 LANDLESS THE FISHERMAN'S WIFE

"Like Macbeth's Weird Sisters crashing a Sandy Denny séance," was how MOJO's folk correspondent Jim Wirth described *Lúireach*, the second album by this ethereal Dublin harmony quartet, when it came out in 2024. The Fisherman's Wife is the first of two Ewan MacColl songs on this CD, originally written for a 1960 radio documentary about herring fishing communities in East Anglia and north-east Scotland.

Written by Ewan MacColl. Copyright control IENS2300004. ©Glitterbeat Records (2024). landless.bandcamp.com



#### 8 THE DUBLINERS THE WILD ROVER

Back to the source, and the opening track of the first Dubliners album from 1964, recorded live to capture the atmosphere of a traditional pub seisiún. The song's origins are lost in the mists of time – one theory dates it to the 17th century – but its romance endures: The Pogues covered it for the B-side of Sally MacLennane.

Written by Barney McKenna, Ciarán Bourke, John Sheahan, Ronald Drew, Luke Kelly. Logo Songs Ltd. ©1963 Sanctuary Records Group Ltd., a BMG Company. Licensed courtesy of BMG Rights Management (UK) Ltd. ISRC: GBAJE6400573



#### 13 TERRY WOODS TENNESSEE STUD

Terry Woods' remarkable CV includes stints in Sweeney's Men, The Woods Band and Steeleye Span – which made him by some distance the most musically experienced member of The Pogues when he joined the band in 1986. This wired version of the old country song came out as a single in 1980, and found Woods joined by another rebel hero of Irish music, Phil Lynott, who also produced it.

Written by J Driftwood. Acuff-Rose Music Ltd. ©1981 Ace Copyrights Ltd (Cosmos Music) ISRC: GBBHN9200394



#### 14 SWAMPTRASH THE CUILLEN

Like the Nyah Fearties, Swamptrash were another Scottish band with a radical take on roots music, throwing in plenty of punked-up bluegrass for good measure. The Cuillen – possibly named after the Cuillin mountains on Skye – comes from a 1988 Janice Long session, released on the Bone EP. Frontman Harry Horse became a successful children's author before passing in 2007; other members formed the Celtic fusion band, Shooglenifty.

Written by Harry Horse. Publisher PRS copyright control. DDTEP 002 (DDT Records)



#### 15 THE CLANCY BROTHERS AND TOMMY MAKEM WHISKEY, YOU'RE THE DEVIL

The traditional drinking song was adapted by Thin Lizzy for Whiskey In The Jar, and inevitably claimed by The Pogues, for the B-side of A Pair Of Brown Eyes. Here, though, it's performed by the Aran-clad Irish immigrants who became toasts of the New York folk revival – and fast friends with the young Bob Dylan.

(arr Clancy) Harmony Music. First released 1959

THE  
POGUES  
REVISIT  
RUM  
SODOMY  
& THE  
LASH  
STARTS  
PAGE 62



WILCO ≤ *a ghost is born*

DELUXE EDITION

'Wilco's second straight masterpiece celebrates its 20th anniversary.'

**Mojo, Reissue of the Month ★★★★★**

'It may be the most pivotal album in Wilco's catalogue. This sprawling boxset chronicles their experiments as well as their upheavals. This version of the band managed to transform their troubles into beautifully harrowing music.'

**Uncut ★★★★★**

'An abundant retrospective of Wilco's most adventurous statement. Exhaustive and impressively curated.'

**Record Collector ★★★★★**

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**Original Studio Album Plus:**

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## Brian D'Addario

LEMON TWIG, SOLO BRANCH

### What music are you currently grooving to?

I've been listening to Jobim's *Waters Of March* a lot lately! Also, *The Best Of Eddie Cochran* and the *Rare Joe Meek Recordings Of The '60s* compilation. Plus, Eiichi Ohtaki's *A Long Vacation*.

### What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

I guess *Pet Sounds*. I can't think of a record that's moved me more in my life. You can always discover new things from it... and it's some of the most beautiful singing on record.

### What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

The first CD was *The Who's Live At Leeds* at Virgin Megastore in Times Square. It blew my mind. It made it hard for me to listen to the studio versions of those songs because the live versions were so powerful.

### Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

Maybe Roy Wood because he can

play everything including saxes and cellos. Or McCartney since his voice can't be beat, and he seems to have endless energy and ambition.

### What do you sing in the shower?

Recently it's probably been *The Cookies' I Never Dreamed*, which me and [brother and bandmate] Michael have both been obsessed with.

### What is your favourite Saturday night record?

*Accelerator* by Royal Trux gets me hyped. It's one of the craziest sounding records. Neil Hagerty is one of the most original guitar players and Jennifer Herrema's voice is so cool.

### And your Sunday morning record?

*Black Flower* by Nirvana (UK). It has really good orchestrations and the songwriting is fun, harpsichord-led '60s pop. Plus, it has the song *It Happened Two Sundays Ago* on it, so it's perfect!

*Till The Morning* is out on March 20 on Headstack Records.

# ALL BACK TO MY PLACE

THE STARS REVEAL THE SONIC DELIGHTS GUARANTEED TO GET THEM GOING...

## Kristin Hersh

THROWING MUSE, TRIATHLETE

### What music are you currently grooving to?

*A casa mais estranha não tem número...* Brazilian lo-fi. Great, unpretentious stuff that reflects spaces and senses and communicates so unselfconsciously, you can't help but be moved. And Tendon Levey, a lovely pain-carrier of a person and dear friend, who lived such a difficult life and nevertheless created so much beauty. Same with Yoñlu, who deserved more peace and happiness than he felt here.

### What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

Geez, is there such a thing? Maybe

*Meat Puppets' Up On The Sun* because it's so fearlessly itself.

### What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

X's *Los Angeles* on Slash... Doo Wop Records, Aquidneck Island, Rhode Island. What a record store, life-altering. Better than any radio station or teenage brother as far as providing a musical education.

### Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

My son Wyatt, who is by nature, a composer rather than a songwriter. I know a few people like this, who hone their craft so that when they jump into the River Music, they come back to the shore dripping with hours of melody.

### What do you sing in the shower?

I'd most likely just hum. *The Monkees' Goin' Down* is probably the most hum-friendly.

### What is your favourite Saturday night record?

Karen Dalton's *1966*. Possible that my Saturday nights are different from other people's, hahaha. If I'm not playing, then I'm hiding. This record helps you hide.

### And your Sunday morning record?

An instrumental Prince cover, *Sometimes It Snows In April*, by Ludovico Einaudi. I have been known to play this a hundred times on repeat and then start the whole process over. There's something I'm still trying to grasp that I haven't yet learned from it. Be ready, if I invite you to brunch.

*Throwing Muses' Moonlight Concessions* is out now on Fire.

## Lonnie Holley

IMPROV FOLK ARTIST

### What music are you currently grooving to?

Moor Mother's last record, *The Great Bailout*, which I was honoured to sing a song on. But, really, I enjoy all music.

### What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

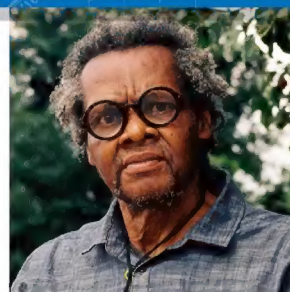
Stevie Wonder's *Innervisions* or *Songs In The Key Of Life*. To hear his music and him being blind totally fascinated me. The music has a message for all of us on Earth. It's just a great wonder. That's his name - Stevie Wonder. Man, it makes you wonder, who is this cat?

### What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

Sam Cooke's *A Change Is Gonna Come*. I got it in Birmingham, Alabama at a record store on 4th Avenue.

### Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

I've never wanted to be anyone but me, but if I could sing like someone else, it would be Jackie



Wilson. And if I was a writer, I would want to write like Bob Dylan.

### What do you sing in the shower?

I honestly don't. That's the time I think about what I'm going to sing next.

### What is your favourite Saturday night record?

Saturday feels like my Johnnie Taylor time. He was singing about love, the habits of love, the mistakes of love, what our consequences are in love. Who's making love to your lady while you out making love? It's music that you can go out to, or you could just stay in and groove off of it. If I went out Saturday night, I still would love to hear Johnnie Taylor, right? We're gonna go to the juke joint, cross the tracks and all of that.

### And your Sunday morning record?

Something by Shirley Caesar or anything by Aretha Franklin. Whenever I listen to Aretha Franklin, it was almost like I was listening to her father also, because I remember Reverend C.L. Franklin preaching.

Lonnie Holley's *Tonky* is out on March 21 on Jagjaguwar.

"Saturday night, we're gonna go to the juke joint, cross the tracks and all of that."

LONNIE HOLLEY



Anastasia Sanchez/Viva Vadim/Getty



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# Theories, rants, etc.

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## ROBERTA FLACK. RICK BUCKLER. MIKE RATLEDGE.

Gwen McCrae. Jerry Butler. Jamie Muir. After the losses of Marianne Faithfull, Garth Hudson and Sam Moore in the weeks and days leading up to MOJO 377, it's been another sobering month for bereavements in our world, and one which makes us think about the work MOJO needs to do for our readers.

This issue achieves a lot of what we shoot for each month. Great, unheard stories proliferate: about Brian Wilson, and Prince; about hash parties with Jeff Bridges and James Mason; about Elvis Costello's taste for a pomelo. New interviews with artists as diverse as the Sex Pistols, Dionne Warwick and our cover stars Queen show how legends often feel free to talk with more tenderness and frankness as the years pass. And there are enough fresh music recommendations to keep you busy for the next few weeks – like Japanese Breakfast, Annie & The Caldwelles and Emma-Jean Thackray among many others.

There's also a requirement for MOJO to be popular music's journal of record – a magazine that can commemorate the lives of generational heroes, but ensure that artists a little further away from the spotlight are remembered, too. Artists, perhaps, like Bill Fay, who passed away on February 22. This brilliant singer-songwriter's career began again in 1998, when a small label rescued his first two solo albums from long neglect, and MOJO made them our Reissues Of The Month. A rediscovery of a genius, for an enchanted new audience – and now a celebration of an unorthodox creative life well-lived. It's the least, hopefully, that we can do.



JOHN MULVEY, EDITOR

## Shake the freak tree and invite anyone who plops to the ground!

A Genesis cover feature [MOJO 377] is always a reason to rush out to secure a magazine. However, am I missing some raised-eyebrow approach to your reporting that Peter Gabriel is intending to name his follow-up album to *i/o* as *o/i*? Or "Oil", as some of us have come to call a release we are likely to pre-decease. He has form: a successor to 1992's *Us* was heralded "within 18 months". It was to be titled... *i/o*. The next non-soundtrack album was 2002's *Up*.

To follow the Genesis feature with a lead review of Steven Wilson's new album was manna to this fan of prog of the '70s, '80s and beyond. And a four-star one at that. That said, while balanced, Tom Doyle's text did not seem to be quite as positive as the scoring suggested. Additionally – Pedant Alert – Doyle refers to Wilson's "new" collaborator, Andy Partridge. Putting aside Wilson's remix work for XTC (mentioned in the piece), the pair teamed up as long ago as 2018 for How Big The Space.

Phil Morris, Hereford

## It ruins the mystery if everything's explained

Having just read the Genesis article, there is a reference to giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum* – I embroidered this on a denim shirt, pretentious, moi?) being a carnivorous plant. However the lyrics make no mention of the plant being carnivorous, probably because the sap of giant hogweed is phototoxic and causes phytophotodermatitis (exposure to sunlight) in humans, which can result in blisters and scars.

So it is toxic and not carnivorous.

David R Pollard, Heckmondwike

... That's what I love about your magazine: one issue after Edwyn Collins trots out the familiar anti-prog attack on Genesis, Yes and Van Der Graaf Generator [MOJO 376], you guys put Gabriel and co on the cover! When is this prog-bashing going to finally stop? Can people not accept a little diversity in music? Sure, there are times I need to rock out to the Ramones, but sometimes I'm just in the mood for Yes or King Crimson.

Andreas Heller, Lake Constance, Germany



## We're all legends. But you're right, I am a legend

OK, so Ringo has a new country album [MOJO 376] and Paul played some bass on the Stones' last outing. When can we expect the surviving members of the 1960s' two most successful bands to combine forces? Ringo Starr, drums and vocals; Paul McCartney, bass, piano and vocals; Keith Richards, lead guitar and vocals; Mick Jagger, vocals and rhythm guitar... The Rolling Beats! They could knock out a great album of rock'n'roll standards, blues and country covers. Come on, lads, you know it makes sense!

David Ward, via e-mail

## Temperamental artists, eh?

Thanks for the groovy Modtastic CD [Beat Surrender!, MOJO 376] – these themed CDs are keepers. Loved the 50 Weller songs, but I'd flip My Ever Changing Moods to Number 1 over the ubiquitous That's Entertainment. I've met Paul on numerous occasions. Over the years he drove off with a mate's album, told a crowd of adoring fans to fuck off, had a nice chat with me outside the 100 Club, bugged off from a charity signing event without signing anything, gave his time generously at the launch of 66 at Hackney's Earth, and upset longtime followers at the premiere of Jawbone.

At the Jawbone event I managed to get a very reluctant Weller to sign my copy of the soundtrack and the vinyl of *The Jam Live At Wembley Arena 2nd December 1982*, which I attended with my girlfriend (now wife of 40 years), Jeanette. Unfortunately in my excitement I managed to smudge one of the autographs. Moments later I was in the cinema and Paul sat down directly behind [me]. Taking this as a sign from the music gods, I leaned back, explained the smudge and timidly asked Paul to sign again. "Fucking 'ell, mate! You don't want fucking much, do ya?" And with that he signed *Jawbone* again and I shrank down in my seat to watch the film. It's up there with being told to fuck off by the brilliant Marianne Faithfull. But that's another story.

Bruce Marsh, Newbury Park

## I'm a performer, darling. Not a Swiss train conductor

In MOJO 376's cover story, I was surprised to read Paul Weller state there have been relatively few covers of his songs. I believe I may have had the first. I met him in Los Angeles with my transcription of *In The City*, from the first Jam LP. It was not easy to understand all of his lyrics, which he, pen in hand, corrected on my typewritten sheet. It became the lead track on *Twist Again With The Low Numbers* (Rhino, 1978).

Harold Bronson, via e-mail

## There's no musical ghetto that can contain us

Been with this wondrous mag from the start and this is my first attempt at the letters page. With regard to

1965 In 45s [MOJO 376], I would have been 17 and spending all my money on vinyl. Clothes and girls? Maybe later! It was heartwarming to see what I believe is the first mention of the band The Silkie in your pages. I have still got their single You've Got To Hide Your Love Away along with their album *The Silkie Sing The Songs Of Bob Dylan*. They sang excellent harmonies and gave me my favourite version of Boots Of Spanish Leather, and a number called Black Crow Blues which I belted out in a band called Hollowlands. Speaking of harmonies, The Byrds are mentioned in the same article, and my all-time musical hero, Gene Clark, gets a mention. Can I make a case here for I'll Feel A Whole Lot Better being the greatest ever B-side? Over to you.

Mick Garman, Norwich

## True poetry is for the listener

I enjoyed the article on Jesse Ed Davis [MOJO 376]. Alongside the well-known artists it was great to see another Native American, the late John Trudell, getting a mention. I still have my cassette of *AKA Gaffiti Man!* I was lucky to see John at Glastonbury in 1994 and was blown away with the mix of blues-rock instruments, Native American chants and spoken word. He died in 2015 and his poetry, music and activism is sorely missed.

Peter Evans, via e-mail

## Being human is a condition that requires a little anaesthesia

The letters section headlines in MOJO 377 are from Eraserhead, and the fact that I'm solving this month's quotes quandary in a David Lynchless world means that I can't enjoy my victory fully. That being said, director John Landis is a friend of mine, and whilst dining at Hollywood mainstay Musso & Frank's for his birthday a little over 10 years ago, on the way out we glimpsed David dining by himself. John had actually worked as a production assistant on Eraserhead, and hadn't seen David since that time.

Dave Gebroe, via e-mail

## Sweetheart, I want to throw a party

I was delighted to receive MOJO 376 with the same cover as the store copies. When you started putting out special covers for subscribers, with nothing but a photo, I was tempted to let my subscription expire, but I had no easy way of obtaining the issues locally. Those covers seemed to be meant for teenagers who like to look at glossy colour photos of their favourite musical idols. I suspect that most of your subscribers aren't from that demographic group. Thank you for reverting back to the old style.

P. Comeau, via e-mail

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# WHAT GOES ON!

THE HOT NEWS AND BIZARRE STORIES FROM PLANET MOJO

## The Beat Defender

The Jam's powerhouse drummer Rick Buckler left us suddenly on February 17. Pat Gilbert pays stunned tribute.

**“I** MUST ADMIT, I found it a little bit difficult,” said Rick Buckler, with admirable understatement, of The Jam’s dramatic split at the peak of their success in 1982. Speaking to MOJO’s Chris Catchpole about his 2022 photobook *The Jam 1982*, in one of his last in-depth press interviews, he continued, “It just seems so completely unreal, that here we were, after everything that we’ve done, for it to literally be junked... it felt like a sort of musical vandalism, when we felt we had so much more to do, so much more to record.”

A generation of Jam fans agreed with him – just as they knew the group would have been unthinkable with anyone else behind the kit. The Jam, one of the greatest bands of their era, would have been a hugely diminished force without their drummer’s singular skills and unassuming cool.

Buckler, the son of a postman turned GPO engineer, was born on December 6, 1955, in Woking. He was recruited into The Jam by Paul Weller and guitarist Steve Brookes in summer 1973, when the three were pupils at Sheerwater Secondary School. Rick was 17 at the time – two years older than Weller and Brookes – and had first encountered his new bandmates during jam sessions in the school’s music room. Unable to afford decent gear of his own, he had to borrow a drum kit from Guildford’s YMCA for his first live appearance, at Sheerwater Youth Club, for which Weller primed him with a stack of Chuck Berry records. Born Paul Richard Buckler, the drummer was also required to undergo a re-brand as ‘Rick’: there could only ever be one Paul in The Jam.

After Bruce Foxton joined in 1974, the line-up would eventually settle into a three-piece with Weller on guitar and lead vocals and Foxton on bass. It was during this period that the trio honed their chops, playing scores of gigs at pubs and clubs around Surrey. For Rick, it was never about the money or fame, but the joy of performing and the faint possibility of success. “We’d play anywhere,” he told me. “I didn’t care where. If you came from a working-class background, music was one of the few chances to escape. It was obvious we had some talent and Paul was writing great songs, so we just stuck at it.”

Quiet, wry and humorous, Buckler enjoyed the absurdities that attended life in a struggling teenage band. One of his favourite stories involved the group having to borrow a van from a man who kept a pet lion in the back of the vehicle (this was the mid ’70s), with no choice but to take the creature along to gigs. “You wouldn’t believe it, but it did happen,” he’d laugh. When The Jam signed to Polydor Records in early 1977, Rick threw himself into the gruelling live and recording schedule of a major-label act, while also making sure he availed himself of ➤



**“It felt like a sort of musical vandalism... we had so much more to do.”**

**RICK BUCKLER**





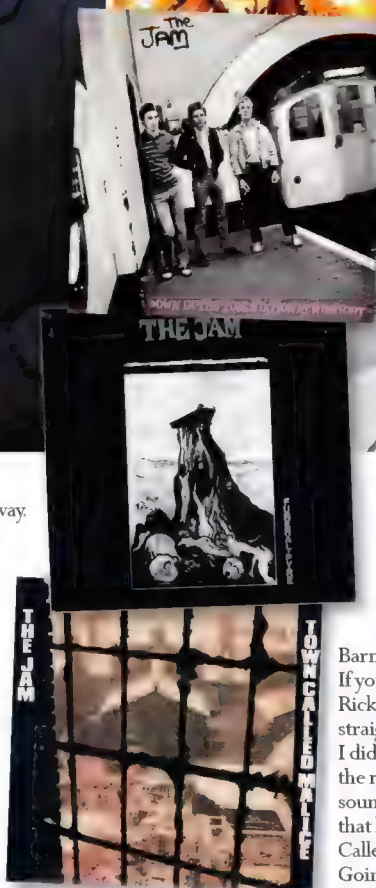
Master craftsman:  
Rick Buckler at Solid  
Bond Studios, Marble  
Arch, London, in 1982.



## WHAT GOES ON!



No malice: (clockwise from above) Buckler and Bruce Foxton, 2007; The Jam in 1982; (from left) Foxton, Buckler and Paul Weller, 1978; Rick Buckler at the forefront of The Jam, London, 1977.



Whatever fun and mischief came the band's way. At the infamous Mont de Marsan punk festival in August 1977, he joined his colleagues in drinking themselves silly before diving into the town fountain, his newly dyed black hair running down his face as the local gendarmes bundled him into the back of their van. By now, Buckler had adopted his trademark Roger McGuinn-style shades, earning the nickname 'Blind Boy' among the crew—a disability he'd sometimes feign in front of strangers.

When it came to studio work, Polydor's A&R Chris Parry described Rick's drumming in the early days as "ragged", but he soon evolved a crisp, precise style that fed into The Jam's fast-moving musical evolution. By 1978's landmark *Down In The Tube Station At Midnight*, Buckler was showing off his skills on a drum solo (much extended live), and from then on his snappy military tattoos and thunderous rock pounding became ever more vital components in The Jam's song arrangements. On 1981's post-punk gem *Funeral Pyre*, his playing was phenomenal, the track dominated by tightly scripted, elongated snare rolls that dramatically rose and fell with the music; this artistic contribution earned him a rare co-songwriting credit.

Every year from 1979 until The Jam's split in 1982, Buckler was voted 'Best Drummer' in the prestigious NME Awards, undeniably a corollary of The Jam's extraordinary popularity (Weller, Foxton and the group itself also triumphed annually in their respective categories) but also as a testament to his highly distinctive technique. Steve 'Smiley' Barnard, a session drummer for Robbie Williams and Joe Strummer's Mescaleros, learned some of Rick's secrets when he replaced Buckler in

From The Jam, Bruce and Rick's millennial Jam 'tribute' act.

"It took me a few shows to nail his style and it was something very subtle," says

Barnard. "It was his posture. If you look on YouTube, Rick sits with his back very straight, chin up. As soon as I did that my arms fell into the right place and I began to sound like him. Funeral Pyre, that long snare roll in *Town Called Malice*, the fills in *Going Underground*, these are amazing things that will stand the test of time on their own."

In the last two years of The Jam, Buckler noticed fissures in the group's once-solid camaraderie. "It began to emerge that we had first and second-class citizens within the band," he told Catchpole. "Obviously we expected Paul to earn more money than myself and Bruce, because he wrote the songs. But there were a few things where it made you think, Well, hold on a minute... I couldn't afford a car, I was struggling with a mortgage. People used to make comments [about it] and I used to dismiss them, because we were having a great time."

When Paul Weller sensationally called time on The Jam after a gig at the Brighton Centre on December 11, 1982, Buckler and Foxton were famously flabbergasted. Rick took the break-up hard—"I woke up in 1983 and it suddenly struck me that I've got no reason to get out of bed any more"—but roused himself to start a new group, Time UK, before briefly teaming up with Foxton in 1986 to form the short-lived Sharp. He also produced recordings by The Highliners and The Family Cat.

Attempts to rekindle his friendship with Weller had foundered, not helped by an episode at the singer's Solid Bond studio, where a preview of *Style Council* material was met with Buckler asking, "Are you taking the piss?" Paul would only speak to Rick once more after that, when the pair ran into each other at a Bruce Foxton solo show; Weller's final words to him reportedly, "Alright, mush?", before disappearing into the crowd.

In the mid-'90s, when Buckler had turned his back on music to work as a furniture restorer, he and Foxton unsuccessfully sued Weller's father and manager John over alleged unpaid royalties, further complicating his relations with Paul. It was Foxton's rapprochement with Weller in 2009 that led to Buckler quitting From The Jam, though the rhythm section subsequently made up.

The drummer then moved into music consultancy and penned several books about his youthful musical adventures, including 2015's memoir *That's Entertainment: My Life In The Jam* and 2022's photobook *The Jam 1982*. He declared himself reconciled to events, and said he knew a band reunion would never happen.

On Buckler's death after a short illness, Foxton was moved to write, "I was shocked and devastated to hear the very sad news today. Rick was a good guy and a great drummer whose innovative drum patterns helped shape our songs. I'm glad we had the chance to work together as much as we did."

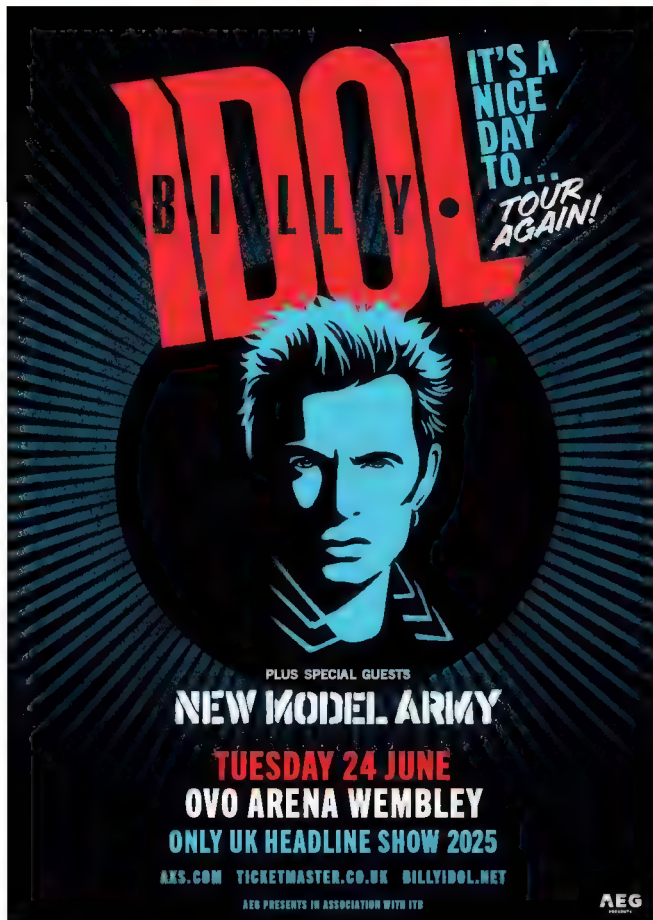
Weller's statement, meanwhile, chose to focus on The Jam's thrilling early days

together. "I'm shocked and saddened by Rick's passing. I'm thinking back to us all rehearsing in my bedroom in Stanley Road, Woking. To all the pubs and clubs we played at as kids, to eventually making a record. What a journey! We went far beyond our dreams and what we made stands the test of time."

Amen to that.

**"At a preview of Style Council material, Buckler asked, 'Are you taking the piss?'"**





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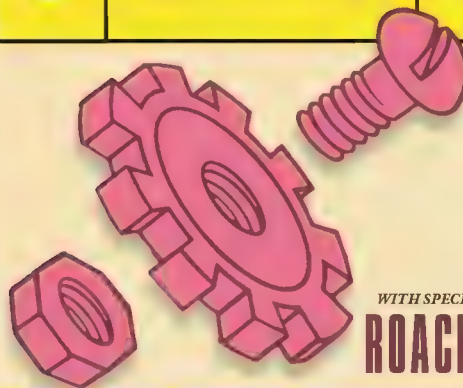
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**"What have I got hiding up back here in the cobwebs of my mind?"**

**MICHAEL McDONALD**

Hollywood hills. Joined by long-serving multi-instrumentalist John McFee, they followed a pattern established on 2021's *Liberté*. Writers worked on songs individually with the fast-working Shanks and session players, which were then augmented by the other members. "John's a pretty fabulous writer and a tremendous player," says Simmons, whose writing and singing credits include 1975 US Number 1 *Black Water*. "He inspired us to push ourselves. [The album] has some of the sounds and styles that we've done in the past – I like that the band has a signature that's recognisable."

The title track – a bluesy song of unity co-sung with Mavis Staples – was written with Shanks specifically for the album, but the rest of the material came from the three principals' song stashes. McDonald says he demoed *The Kind That Lasts* a decade ago: "It's like, What have I got hiding up back here in the cobwebs of my mind that might work?" The swampy New Orleans, says Johnston, was rewritten "drastically" with Shanks "in a matter of two or three hours... I was dancing around the studio. [Backing singer] Charlotte Gibson singing on it was the cherry on top – kind of a Merry Clayton with the Stones kind of thing. And having Mike on the album changes everything. I think his additions are awesome."

With breaks for gigs, recording and mastering was completed in early autumn 2024. Intriguingly, McDonald and Simmons say they're also open to recording in more tried-and-tested ways.

"I think we all kind of missed sitting on the floor together and developing tracks in real time and recording them," says McDonald. "Then, things would change and evolve." "In the old days you couldn't cut and paste, you had to just do it until you got it," adds Simmons. "So we're going to re-examine that way of working and hopefully, you know, maybe make another record."

"We're still functioning, everybody's getting along, songs are still coming," says Johnston. "It's a challenge, but it's still fun."

*Ian Harrison*

*The Doobie Brothers play BST Hyde Park as guests of ELO on Sunday, July 13.*

**FACT SHEET**

**Title:** *Walk This Road*  
**Due:** June  
**Songs:** *Walk This Road* (ft. Mavis Staples); *Lahaina*; *Learn To Let Go*; *State Of Grace*; *Angels & Mercy*; *Call Me*  
**The Buzz:** "It was fast and furious. We were almost engaged in the whole thing before we even realised we'd decided to even make an album. John Shanks is a very, very can-do kind of producer – go in there in the morning and it's not likely you're gonna leave without a song recorded. So it was kind of spontaneous in that way."  
*Michael McDonald*

# THE DOOBIE BROTHERS SPARK UP AGAIN WITH ALBUM 16

IN THEIR '70s heyday, The Doobie Brothers would tour the States in the special plane and non-stop-party-in-the-sky dubbed 'The Doobieliner'. One memorable aerial occasion saw the harmonising blue-eyed soul rockers experiencing weightlessness during a parabolic flight – only slightly marred when someone was sick. Now they're back with new LP *Walk This Road*. Will they be touring it on The Doobieliner, wonders MOJO?

"Thankfully, no," laughs vocalist/keysman Michael McDonald. Guitarist/vocalist and co-founder Tom Johnston, writer and singer of hits including *Long Train Runnin'* and *China*

Grove, avers, "That was a great way to travel! But it burned down."

Old ways and new meet on *Walk This Road*. Though the latter members and co-founder singer/guitarist Patrick Simmons have been reunited since 2019, it's McDonald's first full Doobies album since *One Step Closer* in 1980. "I really felt a strong urge to put our shoulders into one more record together," says the unmistakable voice of *What A Fool Believes* and others.

The hard-touring outfit started work in late '23 at producer John Shanks' well-appointed, comfortable studio in the

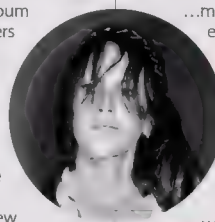
**ALSO WORKING**

...Bauhaus singer **PETER MURPHY** (right) releases a new Youth-produced album in spring. Entitled *Silver Shade*, he calls it, "as powerful as any of my work to date" ...the first LP **NEIL YOUNG** and his new group **Chrome Hearts** – with vocalist/guitarist **Micah Nelson** and **Spooner Oldham** on Farfisa in the line-up –



will, hopes Young, be out soon. "Playing with the Chrome Hearts was a joy as we recorded song after song at Shangri-La [AKA the storied studio in Malibu currently owned by Rick Rubin]," he wrote. "I am very happy to have this all ready for you" ...out later this year, **SPARKS' MAD!** Songs include *A Little Bit Of Light Banter*, *Do Things My Own Way* and *Running Up A Tab At The Hotel For The Fab* ...producer **The**

**Alchemist** announced on US radio show *The Breakfast Club* that he's involved in a new album project by Queens rappers **MOBB DEEP**. Alongside Mobb Deep's **Havoc**, late rapper **Prodigy** will appear via archival voice tracks. **Nas** is also involved ... **BILLY F GIBBONS'** recent release *Livin' It Up Down In Texas* will, he said, precede a new solo record. He promised Forbes it will present, "fresh sonic angles



alongside a few interesting covers. We think it's quite likeable" ...modular and analogue electronic musician **KAITLYN AURELIA SMITH** (left) releases her new LP *Gush* in August. She describes it as "about synaesthesia and surrendering to those moments when the senses melt together" ...London rock'n'rollers **THE GODFATHERS** are working on a new album, expect it in 2026...



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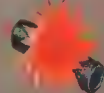
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**WED 26 NOVEMBER**  
**BIRMINGHAM O2 INSTITUTE**  
**THU 27 NOVEMBER**  
**NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY**  
**FRI 28 NOVEMBER**  
**LIVERPOOL O2 ACADEMY**
**SUN 30 NOVEMBER**  
**MANCHESTER O2 RITZ**  
**MON 01 DECEMBER**  
**OXFORD O2 ACADEMY**  
**WED 03 DECEMBER**  
**CARDIFF TRAMSHED**  
**THU 04 DECEMBER**  
**BRISTOL O2 ACADEMY**  
**FRI 05 DEC 2025**  
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**SAT 06** LEEDS BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB

**THU 11** SOUTHAMPTON THE 1865

**FRI 12** EXETER PHOENIX  
**SAT 13** MARGATE DREAMLAND BALLROOM  
**WED 17** SOUTHEND CHINNERY'S  
**THU 18** LONDON O2 FORUM KENTISH TOWN  
**SAT 20** NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY

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WHAT GOES ON!



Queue for the music: customers get in line outside London's Sounds Of The Universe for last year's Record Store Day; (below) some of the vinyl booty available.



# MOJO'S ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO RECORD STORE DAY 2025

IT'S BEEN A regular fixture on the vinyl aficionado's calendar since 2008, celebrating the grass roots record shop and the limited-edition joys to be found within. This April 12, Record Store Day promises to be no exception, with more than 400 exclusive releases to choose from.

As ever, there are collisions of familiarity and novelty. Take the newly rediscovered alternative US version of Public Image Ltd's *First Issue*, with subtly reworked sleeve art and a unique tracklist of re-recordings and different mixes. Also new to wax is yellow-vinyl four-track 12-inch EP *Power To The People – Live At The One To One Concert*, New York City, 1972 by John & Yoko/Plastic Ono Band and pals. Taken from Lennon's final full solo shows, three of the four songs are previously unreleased. George Harrison's triple *All Things Must Pass*, meanwhile, arrives in a retina-shaking Zoetrope picture disc pressing.

This year, numerous releases illuminate artists' early transmissions. Making

their vinyl debut, Queen's *De Lane Lea Demos* restore, from acetates, the group's five earliest recordings. Another acetate-derived set is *Viva Doc Pomus: Songs For Elvis (The Demos)*, which collects recordings sent to The King by the Brill Building titan on double 'opaque orange' wax. *The Soft Machine Turns On '67*, meanwhile, sources the Canterbury scenesters' pre-debut LP recordings from the archives of Giorgio Gomelsky. The Jesus And Mary Chain's primal A- and B-side comp > 45s > 84 > 85 <, on 'splatter' vinyl with their cover of Floyd rarity *Vegetable Man*, looks enticing too.

Other collections shed light on major albums' development. *Strange Days 1967 – A Work In Progress* collects early, pre-overdub mixes of The Doors' second LP; on blue vinyl; mixer Bruce Botnick adds new notes. Thin Lizzy's *Jailbreak (Alternate Version)* replicates the original album using different takes in a remixed sleeve. Curiously, *Tweez (Tweethan Mix)* reverse-mixes Slint's 1989 debut LP on green wax, to better reflect

bassist Ethan Buckler's original vision ("the [Steve] Albini production style ruined our first recording," he protests). Other albums bolstered by intriguing extras include Screaming Trees' *Clairvoyance* (remastered with out-takes) and The Fugs' '65 debut, which is augmented with a whole 'new' album of early sessions entitled *We're The Fugs*.

RSD's live album game remains strong this year. David Bowie's *Ready, Set, Go! (Live, Riverside Studios 03)* presents his pioneering live-to-satellite show of 2003, with a poster. Sly & The Family Stone's *The First Family: Live At Winchester Cathedral 1967* captures the group in full flight the year before they crossed over. Other rude-health documents include Yes's *Live At The Rainbow, London, England 12/16/1972*, Talking Heads' *Live On Tour '78* and The 13th Floor Elevators' *Live Houston Music Theatre '67*. *Moments: The Montreux Years Vol. 1* cherry picks unreleased performances by Muddy Waters, Nina Simone, Marianne Faithfull and more from the celebrated Swiss bash on 'Lake Geneva blue' vinyl. Roger Waters' *The Dark Side Of The Moon Redux (Live)* documents the only live performances of the reimagined version of the totemic LP on neon pink vinyl. Keith Richards and the

"The live version of the Floyd's *Echoes* plays from inside-out for enhanced sound quality..."



X-Pensive Winos weigh in with the red vinyl Live 3.10.22 EP: the three unreleased tracks are topped off by an etched image of Keef on the flip. Nick Mason's 'Saucerful of Secrets' live version of the Floyd's Echoes, meanwhile, comes on 12-inch and plays from inside-out for enhanced sound quality; it also boasts a special etched design on Side B.

Visual appeal alone accounts for a slew of RSD swag this year. The Cure's *The Head On The Door*, Phil Pratt's *Star Wars Dub* and Fleetwood Mac's self-titled 1975 LP make their debuts as picture discs. In the non-black vinyl corner, The Who's 1975 *Tommy OST* is reimagined in orange and blue, the US version of the Stones' *Out Of Our Heads* comes as a clear 180g pressing, and Lou Reed's *Metal Machine Music* is reborn in 'Silver Metallic' and a new sleeve. Blur's *The Magic Whip* and

Supergrass's *I Should Coco* both get the Zoetrope treatment.

The list goes on. Great reggae comps on vinyl from the Soul Jazz label? Check. B-side LPs? Suede, Madness and Marc Bolan have that covered. Live vintage jazz? There are Miles Davis, Bill Evans and Charles Mingus records you may be interested in. Singles? How about Tom Waits' *Get Behind The Mule*, Taylor Swift's white vinyl *Fortnight* or Be Reasonable, on 10-inch from pre-Brit-pop cults Boys Wonder? We haven't even mentioned Pete Shelley's *Yesterday Is Not Here: Radio Sessions 1979-1983*. But such is the infinite variety of Record Store Day 2025. Better get queuing early on April 12, then.

Ian Harrison

See [recordstoreday.co.uk](http://recordstoreday.co.uk) for more info. Support your local record shop.

## DUDE AWAKENING? IT'S JEFF BRIDGES' RSD RELEASE!

JEFF BRIDGES' film career has, of course, taken in such essential movies as *The Last Picture Show* and *The Big Lebowski*. But he's also a musician of long standing – see his T Bone Burnett-produced solo LP from 2011, and more – which brings us to one of RSD 2025's most intriguing releases.

His LP *Slow Magic '77-'78* collects various vintage Bridges material: songs are variously informal and in-studio, from Beefheart experimental to Beach Boys melodious. "Oh, I was thinking about doing another Quaalude," goes the representative, loopy Obnoxious. Two songs have vocals by acting legend Burgess Meredith, who narrates multi-part movie-for-the-mind Kong. For decades it existed only as an informal cassette comp.

"Music would keep bubbling up," says Bridges, surely one of the few men in

the world who smoked hash with the aforementioned Meredith and James Mason. "I built a little studio of my own and for about 10 or 15 years I'd meet with this group of friends every Wednesday night, and we would jam."

Those loosely structured jam nights, where spontaneity was the rule, were recorded by Bridges' pal Steve Baim. Other tracks were cut at studio sessions with co-producer Ken Lauber. Fast forward 40-odd years and Bridges' musician pal Keefus Ciancia tipped off reissue specialists Light In The Attic about the tape. "He didn't even tell me," laughs Bridges. "They said, 'Hey, let's do an album' – I said, 'You're kidding me, man! So, boom, we made an album of all these ancient tunes.'"

Bridges, who's also toured with his band The Abiders ("living my Beatles dream," he says), concurs with a promotional notion that the

LP is "a window into the secret musical life of The Dude," AKA the bowling swami hero of *The Big Lebowski*, possibly his ultimate creation. "Yeah, I am imagining The Dude," he says. "The Dude had a guitar hanging around – was he doing something like this? Put Walter [Sobchak, The Dude's friend, played by John Goodman] on bass!"

Bridges, who's dealt with cancer, Covid and the California wildfires this decade, wonders if more "next-level out-there wild jams" may be released. He also subscribes to the RSD philosophy. "I just recently got a new turntable and ordered a bunch of my old faves," he says. "Van Morrison, Dylan, The Beatles... and *Slow Magic*. It was wonderful to get that spinning on the turntable. Hey, analogue is coming back!"

Ian Harrison

Get *Slow Magic '77-'78 (LITA)* on transparent blue vinyl on RSD.

LAST NIGHT  
A RECORD  
CHANGED  
MY LIFE

## Patterson Hood

The Drive-By Trucker-in-chief salutes Todd Rundgren's *Something/Anything?* (Bearsville, 1972).



My record obsession began when I was three. I remember my dad opening his new copy of *Magical Mystery Tour*, and sitting on his lap,

listening to Strawberry Fields Forever and looking through the booklet. I began collecting records at eight and spent a big part of my childhood as an all-out Elton John fan.

When I had just turned 13, my cool, older cousin turned me onto Todd Rundgren's masterpiece *Something/Anything?*. And to this day it's probably my all-time favourite album.

I love how it leads off with a hit (*I Saw The Light*), how every song takes it to some other place, stylistically and thematically. Sometimes it's stunningly poppy, sometimes downright proggy, and sometimes it just flat-out rocks. I love how he played all the instruments on the first three sides, then essentially recorded side four live with a killer band with false starts and hilarious banter kept intact.

The other hit on the LP was *Hello It's Me*, which I remember hearing on the radio before I knew of Todd as an artist. Like many others, I mistook it for a Carole King song. A song worthy of her name – I love King's songs. I probably sang along with it hundreds of times without thinking what the words were saying.

Many years later, I was kind of on the skids, personally, and getting tossed around by my girlfriend of the time. It was really giving me a mind-fuck. I was at work, early morning, after a particularly bumpy night and *Hello It's Me* came on the radio. The whole wordplay struck me as a perfect description of where we were at, and I literally had to excuse myself and cry for a bit before I gathered myself enough to finish my shift cooking rancid chicken wings at a terrible fast food joint. To this day, it's my all-time favourite song.

Patterson Hood's *Exploding Trees & Airplane Screams* is out now on ATO Records.



The young Dude: Jeff Bridges conjures some *Slow Magic* for Record Store Day 2025.



Blade runner:  
Alabaster DePlume  
prepares to get  
over himself.



## ALABASTER BLASTERS

Five prime  
DePlume  
pearls.

1 Vladimir  
Vysotsky  
*Koni Priveredivye*  
(MELODISC, 1975)

2 Paul Robeson  
*Old Man River (Live at  
Carnegie Hall, 1958)*  
(VANGUARD, 1999)

3 Thelonious  
Monk *Japanese Folk  
Song* (COLUMBIA, 1967)

4 Melt-Banana  
*Teeny Shiny*  
(A-ZAP, 2000)

5 Julmud *Basma*  
(BILKATES, 2022)

for people. When do I do something that's just good for me, not for some romantic connection with someone who I'm giving responsibility to? What do I want to do? And the answer I found was, What, apart from having a fight? I'm the soft, lovely, be-gentle person, going around being nice to people. Obviously, I want a scrap!

### Fighting? Uncool!

I'm being playful with my language. Out of respect for my training partner's skill, I will go at them properly, as if I wanted to wish them harm. But if I get them into a position where I could actually hurt them, I'm going to trust them to tap and they're going to trust me to stop. We wish each other well, because we like training together. And there is a

depth of respect in the way that we're gonna learn to fall. Learning to fall is as profound a thing as it sounds. It is very good for me to go and be a bit shit at something and be thrown, and to get over myself. I have found where my limitations are.

### Could you draw parallels between that kind of improvisational trust and making music?

Yeah, maybe there's an aspect of that. In jiu-jitsu, as soon as you think, I want to do this technique to this person, then you have lost, really. It's about responding emotionally, truly being in the moment and enjoying it, and not *trying* to do it, and it's the same thing with making the tunes. You let go and you get out of the way of the song. The song wants to come through. Let us allow it to happen. I respond to you honestly. That means I cannot know what is going to happen. I can't ask you for anything, because I'm going to respond truly to what I discover, who I discover you to be.

### Will AI ever get near the infinite variety of humankind?

What, in terms of, like, seeing funny videos? Either I've got loads of views on it, or, I don't know, not yet. My friend Jordan Copeland at Tenentnet, who has made all my best music videos, made a distinction. We will find it useful in generative aspects, but it doesn't know how to edit, and that will be our role. We, as humans, will be able to focus on curation without having to come up with the generative initial thing.

### Tell us something you've never told an interviewer before.

I can't stand eggs. I'm a vegetarian, but eggs?

What the fuck? Oh my god, keep that away from me. It's the substance and the smell and the fact, the history, where it has come from... I feel like everyone is in on some sort of big joke where they're pretending that they actually enjoy eggs, but I don't know how you do it.

As told to Ian Harrison

*A Blade Because A Blade Is  
Whole is out now on  
International Anthem.*

# Alabaster DePlume

The sax improv trickster talks the relentless heart, the creative moment and learning to fall.

**R**AISED IN Manchester and based in London, the man born Angus Fairbairn taught himself sax in 2007 and embarked upon his singular recording odyssey in 2012, making waves in reality on the capital's improv scene with wide-eyed spoken word and fluttering horn murmurings. Like his other albums, Alabaster DePlume's latest *A Blade Because A Blade Is Whole* takes the listener into meditational, emancipatory non-places where avant-jazz and Zen one-ness converge. A cosmic, warm presence, he's also busy in the world, with trips to the dentist and the US embassy to attend to. But the man whose latest PR release calls a "poet philosopher of life and death" still has time to ask your interviewer, "how is your heart?"

### My heart's not bad, thanks. How is yours?

It's ridiculous. Relentless. Why would it bother being relentless? I don't have an answer for that. We must shout, let us contribute hope to the situation we face. It is a playful, foolish thing to live... it is absurd. So why is my heart relentless? I don't know. Being alive is hard. Whoever you are, reading this, I love that you bother to live. It's hard.

### People might be quite surprised by your interest in jiu-jitsu.

Oh my god. I love it. I started doing it three years ago. I had known for a long time that I had been looking for my value in another person, and eventually I asked myself, Well, how do I spend my time? I spend all my time working. I love my work, my work is good

"I'm the  
soft, lovely,  
be-gentle  
person...  
obviously,  
I want a  
scrap!"

ALABASTER  
DEPLUME



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PRESENTS

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MAY 2025

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**THU 15 MAY** | GLASGOW ORAN - MOR  
**SAT 17 MAY** | HOLMFIRTH PICTUREDROME

**SUN 18 MAY** | BIRMINGHAM TOWN HALL  
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**WED 21 MAY** | O2 SHEPHERDS BUSH EMPIRE LONDON

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**FRI 19 MAY** | FROME CHEESE & GRAIN  
**SAT 20 MAY** | LINCOLN ENGINE SHED  
**THU 22 MAY** | BRIDLINGTON SPA  
**FRI 23 MAY** | LONDON CADOGAN HALL  
**SAT 24 MAY** | WOLVERHAMPTON  
**THE WULFRUN AT THE HALLS**

**THU 25 MAY** | WARWICK ARTS CENTRE  
**FRI 26 MAY** | HOLMFIRTH PICTUREDROME  
**SAT 27 MAY** | SUNDERLAND FIRE STATION  
**THU 29 MAY** | NORWICH EPIC  
**FRI 30 MAY** | WARRINGTON PARR HALL  
**SAT 31 MAY** | ULVERSTON THE CORD

THE GIG CARTEL PRESENTS

# HUGH CORNWELL

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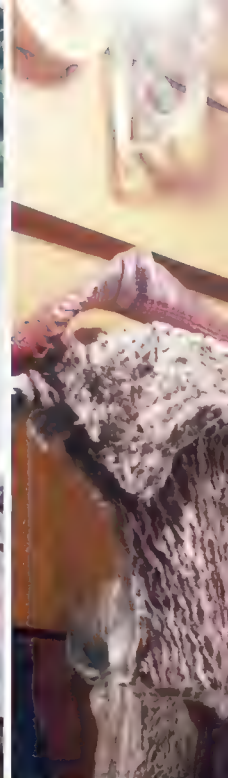
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**THU 13 NOV** - LONDON ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY  
**FRI 14 NOV** - WARWICK ARTS CENTRE  
**SAT 15 NOV** - FROME CHEESE & GRAIN  
**SUN 16 NOV** - BRIGHTON CONCORDE 2  
**THU 20 NOV** - GLASGOW ST LUKES  
**FRI 21 NOV** - GLENROTHES ROTHES HALL  
**SAT 22 NOV** - NEWCASTLE DIGITAL

THEGIGCARTEL.COM / HUGHCORNWELL.COM





# Diamond R&B

Atlantic Records celebrates its 75th birthday with a lavish photo book.

ON DECEMBER 31, 1947, one of music's all-time great labels was born in New York. Before the founders' signatures sealed the deal, the original name Horizon Records was crossed out in favour of Atlantic Records. In charge were Turkish diplomat's son Ahmet Ertegun and dental student Herb Abramson. Using money borrowed from Ertegun's dentist, the two music nuts were up and running.

Soon they'd be joined by producers Jerry Wexler and Tom Dowd, and over the decades that followed the label released prime jazz, R&B and, after signing a deal with Stax in Memphis, soul. A move into rock and pop in the late '60s, meanwhile, set the scene for success as part of the Warner Records group. Along the way, still-vital LPs by Aretha Franklin, Led Zeppelin, John Coltrane and CSNY landed in the catalogue.

These momentous years are chronicled in Taschen's handsome new visual history, 75 Years Of Atlantic Records, the compiling of which evidently took a little longer than its creators anticipated. It features shoots drawn

from the label's archives and the files of photographers including Jim Marshall, Annie Leibovitz, Anton Corbijn, Lee Friedlander and more. The accompanying images show three Atlantic signings in their pomp: Disco Inferno hitmakers The Trammps, New Orleans gris-gris man Dr. John and Aretha Franklin, who's pictured in Atlantic Studios in New York in 1970 with an array of celebrated collaborators.

The book's 461 pages contain much else to feast the eyes. Black and white shots of artists including LaVern Baker, Ray Charles and The Coasters represent the '40s and '50s.

Things continued to shift in the next decade: with elder Ertegun brother Nesuhi on the team, Atlantic's jazz side is illustrated in colour by the MJQ, Art Blakey and Charles Mingus, while the decade's explosion of soul is depicted in portraits of Otis Redding, Percy Sledge and Sam & Dave. One of several illuminating essays, Barney Hoskyns' Pop Goes Atlantic alludes to the in-house chemistry that promoted such sustained creativity. "We had this incredible roster of repeating singers, and almost no one-hit wonders," Wexler is quoted. "We believed in singers and not just interpreters."

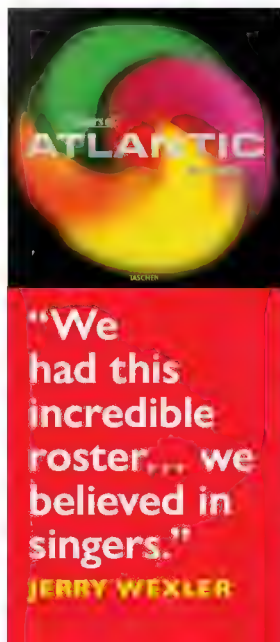
In the rock era the hits kept coming, as Sonny & Cher, Dusty Springfield and the Bee Gees made room for Cream, the



Stones, Yes, and AC/DC, as well as Chic and (in the US at least) Roxy Music. The label's still trading. The ethos that got them so far, it seems, is captured in David Ritz's essay The Soul Of Atlantic when he quotes Ahmet Ertegun: "We founded this company on music we sincerely loved. And we loved the music because we could feel its sincerity."

Ian Harrison

75 Years Of Atlantic Records is published by Taschen this month.





Voodoo guru: Dr. John in the right place, 1973; (opposite, from top) The Trammps light the disco inferno in an outtake from 1976's *Where The Happy People Go* LP shoot; Atlantic power trio (from left) Jerry Wexler, Ahmet Ertegun and Miriam Abramson, 1951; Atlantic Studios control room, New York, mid-session for Aretha Franklin's *This Girl's In Love With You*, 1969 (from left) Duane Allman, Franklin, Wexler, Arif Mardin and Tom Dowd.





Crock'n'roll stars: Jim Kweskin & The Jug Band (back row, from left) Richard Greene, Kweskin, Bill Keith, (front row) Fritz Richmond, Maria Muldaur, Geoff Muldaur, 1967.



fingerpick fleet and flashy guitar by listening to Pete Seeger and later Mississippi John Hurt, and began gigging at folk clubs. "In early 1963 I was playing at the Club 47 in Cambridge, which was the home base for folk music in Boston. I was billed as just Jim Kweskin, but it was never just me alone. It was always with a bunch of local musicians: a fiddle player, a harmonica player, banjo, mandolin. My gigs were basically jam sessions." The president of Vanguard Records offered him a record contract. "I had a record contract for a band that didn't exist." Within months the

newly-formed Jim Kweskin & The Jug Band recorded their first album.

Among the musicians to emerge from the Kweskin Jug Band were Geoff Muldaur, Bill Keith, Richard Greene, jug blower Fritz Richmond and others, including singer/fiddler Maria D'Amato, who married Muldaur and became popular as Maria Muldaur. By 1968 Kweskin was immersed in both his construction business and harmonica player Mel Lyman's controversial community, and gigged and recorded at a slower pace. When he retired around 2016, he began playing music more often, something he still pursues as he celebrates his 85th birthday this year. His love of older music continues unabated. "I don't cover songs," he notes. "I uncover them."

Michael Simmons

## JUG BAND VET AND FINGERPICKING PRO JIM KWESKIN KEEPS ON BLOWING

ORIGINALLY POPULAR in the early 20th century, jug bands like the Dixieland Jug Blowers and Cannon's Jug Stompers played a combination of ragtime and blues centred around blowing into a jug to create a sputtering bass pattern. "The jug resonates the sound," explains Jim Kweskin to MOJO. "It's like farting with your mouth." Jug bands became popular again in the early 1960s amidst the folk revival and eventually led to rock bands including The Lovin' Spoonful and Grateful Dead. They were a relative of skiffle – in vogue in the UK at the same time and the roots of The Beatles.

But no straight-ahead '60s jug band was as popular and influential as the Jim Kweskin

Jug Band. Based out of Boston from 1963 through 1968, Kweskin and company were top-shelf musicians with a sense of humour and fun. He's also namechecked in Dylan biopic *A Complete Unknown*. Kweskin has always had a deep affection for older music that stems from childhood. As a kid, he discovered his father's 78 rpm records by Jelly Roll Morton, Sidney Bechet, Bix Beiderbecke, Cab Calloway, Leadbelly and Bessie Smith. "I fell in love with that music while my friends were listening to the pop music of the day," he recalls. "When I was a teenager I discovered folk music. Eventually I put folk and jazz together which is essentially what jug band music is: early jazz played on folk instruments."

He learned how to

"Jug band music is early jazz played on folk instruments."

JIM KWESKIN

### KWESKIN COLLECTED

#### Three of Jim's gems.

##### Jim Kweskin & The Jug Band Greatest Hits!

(VANGUARD, 1970)



An excellent starter kit. Jug anthems such as *Jug Band Music* are mixed with Chuck Berry's *Memphis* and Hawaiian hokum *Ukulele Lady*.

##### Jim Kweskin Never Too Late

(STORYSOUND, 2024)



Duets with Kweskin's distaff pals Maria Muldaur, Samoa Wilson, Meredith Axelrod and Juli Crockett. Instrumentalists include steel guitarist Cindy Cashdollar, fiddler Suzy Thompson and Annie Raines on harmonica.

##### Jim Kweskin & The Berlin Hall Saturday Night Revue

Doing Things Right  
(JALOPY, 2025)



A potpourri of Americana by one of its creators working with killer musicians.

Everything from Western Swing to a New Orleans mambo to the Great American Songbook to a reefer anthem.



In a field of his own: Jim Kweskin today – "I don't cover songs, I uncover them."





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SCAN HERE





Facing the strange:  
Emma-Jean  
Thackray finds  
levity in the groove.

"I love  
bebop, I love  
challenging  
music. But  
I also love a  
big tune."

EMMA-JEAN  
THACKRAY

FACT SHEET

• For fans of:  
Thundercat, Erykah  
Badu, Robert Glasper

• Comedian/  
musician Reggie  
Watts guests on  
Black Hole: "I knew  
he'd bring the  
P-Funk silliness."  
MC/drummer/  
composer Kassa  
Overall, meanwhile,  
"brought poetry to  
It's Okay – who else  
could understand  
mental health  
struggles, but also  
find nuggets of  
humour in it?"

• At the Royal Welsh  
College Of Music And  
Drama, Thackray  
studied improv  
under jazz legend  
Keith Tippett. "He  
was batshit crazy, in  
the best way. I was  
taking a lot of drugs  
at the time, and  
turned up to class off  
my actual nut. We  
were all improvising,  
and I turned my  
trumpet round and  
started vocalising  
into the bell.  
Everyone was like,  
'What is she doing?'  
But Keith gave me a  
standing ovation. He  
just loved that I took  
a risk."

KEY TRACKS

- Black Hole
- Wanna Die
- Thank You For  
The Day

# JAZZ-FUNK MAVERICK EMMA-JEAN THACKRAY WEIRDS OUT!

**I**N EARLY 2023, shortly after beginning work on the follow-up to *Yellow*, her sprawling, cosmic jazz-funk debut album, Emma-Jean Thackray was blindsided by the sudden death of her partner, electronica composer Matthew Gordon. "I just felt so lost," she remembers, calling from the cramped studio within her south London flat. "I didn't do anything other than stare at the wall like a blob for six months. I didn't know who I was any more. But eventually, I realised my only way back to myself would be through music."

Music had been Thackray's North Star since she began playing cornet, aged eight. Soon she was performing in Yorkshire colliery brass bands, becoming an evangelical jazzbo after being assigned the solo trumpet piece *Concierto De Aranjuez*. "I'd downloaded Miles Davis's version of the song, and it blew my mind," she grins. "He wasn't playing what was on my sheet music, but threading all the other musicians together with his soloing. It was incredible." But when she'd play this music to her friends, the magic didn't translate. "They'd be bored. They were normal,

and I was always a little weirdo," she shrugs. "I'd grown up not realising I was neurodiverse, always being othered. But as a teenager, I got defiant: I'm going to do my own thing, get really into this music I love, and not expect anyone else to come with me or understand."

This energy propelled her to the Royal Welsh College Of Music And Drama, and then London. "I ran jazz orchestras, and wrote for large ensembles. Leading brass bands, I'd grown used to harnessing lots of people and marshalling these big sounds. I wanted to be the next Carla Bley." She cut an eclectic series of EPs, and followed them with *Yellow*, which was Thackray "showing everything I can do: spiritual jazz; arrangements for brass and strings; funk songs where I'm singing about the universe."

Burned out from heavy touring, Thackray already sensed her second album, *Weirdo*, would be "more intimate, more introspec-

tive". Following Gordon's death, making it became "my therapy, my reason to wake up". She spent a year alone in the studio, writing and recording, "not talking to anyone else, wearing pyjamas all day. The songs became like a grief diary. But there's a lot of hope and humour in there. And even if the words are bleak at points, there's levity in the groove."

Indeed, if *Weirdo* is sometimes disconcertingly stark, the music is often uplifting, touching on '80s soul, '70s funk and more. "I'm a child of the club," she says. "I love bebop, I love beautiful, challenging music. But I also love a big tune."

*Weirdo* closes with the ecstatic Thank You For The Day, which Thackray wrote "before my life fell apart. But it belonged at the end of the record, because it felt like climbing out of the hole. *Weirdo* is about this painful grief, but it's also about survival and resilience. And making it saved my life – I'm not sure

I'd still be here without this record to focus on, and to help me get back in touch with myself."

Stevie Chick

Emma-Jean Thackray's *Weirdo* is released April 25 on Brownswood Recordings/Parlophone.



# ACHTUNG! THE FALL'S OLD GUARD REASSEMBLE AS HOUSE OF ALL

**C**APTAIN BEEFHEART, Prince and Ian Dury may have left the planet, but that didn't stop The Magic Band, The Revolution and The Blockheads from playing the old favourites live. This is not the objective of House Of All, a group comprised of ex-members of The Fall. It's masterminded by guitarist Martin Bramah, who co-founded the class-of-one Manchester legends with Mark E Smith in 1976 and departed after 1979 debut *Live At The Witch Trials* to form the Blue Orchids.

"Mark was the constant presence and the genius," says Bramah of his old teenage pal who died in 2018. "But The Fall was bigger than Mark. We've all got something of that spirit in us. I wanted to get some members together and create something that was a continuation of The Fall's working model – obviously with a respectful distance after Mark's passing."

And so, for three days in a Manchester studio in June 2022, Bramah was joined by Fall veterans of heavy pedigree: bassist Steve Hanley and his drumming brother Paul, drummer Simon Wolstencroft and final Fall guitarist Pete Greenaway. They convened with no preconceived ideas. "On that first morning I was thinking, What the fuck have I done?" Bramah says. "It was, turn up, press record and play, and as soon as we listened back, we just knew it was gonna work."

So far three albums have been created via in-the-moment spontaneity, with Bramah's spoken-sung supernatural speculations, deep stratum bass, and garage guitars striking Fall mysterio-discord notes without being merely imitative. Smith, meanwhile, makes a semi-cameo in Harlequin Duke from 2023's self-titled debut, which declares, "Maybe our Bingo Master has returned!"

"Mark was a great editor and we all knew what was expected of us, so it was a bit like he was in the other room," muses Bramah, adding, "It was kind of my baby as well. Before we even started the band, taking LSD together, listening to Beefheart, Can and The Velvet Underground... a profound experience, especially as a teenager. There was a kind of Vulcan mind meld between the two of us."

After last year's *Continuum*, new album

*House Of All Souls* also features original wild man drummer Karl Burns, who served several tours of Fall duty until 1998, after which he's kept resolutely out of sight. After Bramah referred to Burns as a "hermit" in *The Irish Times* ("he sent me a message saying, 'less of the fucking hermit, Bramah!'" ), the elusive

Burns duly signed up.

"We got straight into the session," Burns tells MOJO. "The years just fell away – back with the old gang! Absolutely, it is a continuum. It's what attracted me to it, carrying on The Fall mission. Let's just say it's much more of a democracy without Mark!"

The late MES was known to strongly disapprove of his ex-wife Brix's old Fall crew The Extricated. But what would he have made of House Of All? "I think he would have approved," says Bramah. "He'd have been glad to see that we're cracking on and doing something creative. He was a bloody-minded person, but he loved us all."

Ian Harrison

*House Of All Souls* is out now on *Tiny Global Productions*.

**"The Fall was bigger than Mark E Smith."**  
MARTIN BRAMAH, HOUSE OF ALL



The rise and fall of... House Of All (from left) Steve Hanley, Pete Greenaway, Simon Wolstencroft, Martin Bramah, Phil Lewis, Karl Burns and Paul Hanley.

## FACT SHEET

- For fans of: The Fall, Blue Orchids, Pere Ubu
- House Of All have played 1984 Fall fave *The Lay Of The Land* "to annoy people," and a one-off rebooting of 1990's *Telephone Thing* as *Al Thing*, but there are no plans to incorporate any more Fall material into their live set. "We're using the rules and moving forward," says Bramah.
- The name, says Bramah, came from browsing Latin etymology and finding the funerary inscription *Domus Omnium: Mortuorum* – "House Of All The Dead". I thought, Take the first bit, good name. I was going to go with the Latin, then I thought, Bit pretentious. It was when I saw *House Of All* written down in English I realised 'The Fall' was in there. It was a happy accident."

## KEY TRACKS

- Harlequin Duke
- Gaudy Pop
- Scramble
- The Devil's House

## MOJO PLAYLIST



Tune in! For protest funk, dream reformations and rock noise.

### 1 MARK PRITCHARD AND THOM YORKE THIS CONVERSATION IS MISSING YOUR VOICE

From collaborative LP *Tall Tales*, Yorke falsettos ambivalence over oil-slick electronics, C'mon Everybody rhythms and fading tape. Find it: streaming services

### 2 MICHAEL SHANNON AND R.E.M. PRETTY PERSUASION

Actor Shannon's *Fables Of The Reconstruction Tour* hit Athens, and all four members of R.E.M. got up on-stage and joined in. "Oh my fucking god!" concluded Shannon. Find it: YouTube

### 3 PAUL MCCARTNEY STEP INSIDE LOVE

Macca's original 1967 voice-and-guitar demo, with bossa nova shimmy, melodic sophistication and no Cilla Black. Find it: YouTube

### 4 GALACTIC AND IRMA THOMAS LADY LIBERTY

Social protest from the Crescent City, as lively funk foregrounds Irma setting America to rights: "Lady Liberty took a fall." Find it: YouTube

### 5 BON IVER EVERYTHING IS PEACEFUL LOVE

From new album, *Sable, Fable*, a soft-'80s funk-pop bath of rustic soul and vulnerability. Lovely pedal steel kiss-off. Find it: YouTube

### 6 PERFUME GENIUS FT. ALDOUS HARDING NO FRONT TEETH

Wood-grained folk with vocals by Harding unexpectedly rocks out hard. From new album *Glory*. Find it: YouTube

### 7 GAVIN FRIDAY VOYAGE, VOYAGE

Goth disco from the Virgin Prunes' über-poseur, as he covers Desireless's 1989 Eurohit. Find it: streaming services

### 8 SEA FEVER SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN THIS WAY

Section 25/New Order/Johnny Marr collaborators channel rainy sequencer action and danceable melancholy. Find it: streaming services

### 9 1,000 ARTISTS IS THIS WHAT WE WANT?

Kate Bush, Damon Albarn, The Clash and more record silent studios in protest at big tech's AI vampirism. Titles spell 'The British Government Must Not Legalise Music Theft To Benefit AI Companies.' Find it: streaming services

### 10 THE BRITISH STEREO COLLECTIVE MOONBASE BRITANNICA

From an album of themes for imaginary 1970s TV, an ABBA-flecked disco-in-space tune for zero-g grooving. Find it: *Starburst LP*, *Bandcamp*







# One of the Last Great Record Men, the 'Artist's A&R' in the Golden Age of Warner Brothers and beyond, counsellor to Prince, Van, Randy, Elliott Smith and more, shares his wisdom. "Producing is hard," says Lenny Waronker.

INTERVIEW BY BOB MEHR • PORTRAIT BY ROGER KISBY

**S**AT IN THE KITCHEN OF HIS WEST LOS Angeles home on an early winter's day, absorbing the first of many questions, Lenny Waronker closes his eyes and bows his head in a state of deep concentration.

Waronker — one of the business's most storied producers, A&Rs and label execs, and among the most loved by musicians — ascribes this prayerlike posture to a childhood spent on Hollywood studio soundstages, witnessing classic film scores being recorded. His father, Si Waronker, was a violinist who'd later help corral orchestral musicians at 20th Century Fox for Oscar-winning composer/conductor Alfred Newman.

"My father wasn't a strict man, except in that environment," recalls Waronker. "When the orchestra were ready to record, a bell would ring. He would say to me, 'Don't move.' He might've said 'Don't breathe' as well. It's the way I've listened to music, or anything, ever since."

The 83-year-old Waronker delivers his words in soft, measured tones as he recounts a life devoted to helping artists realise their creative potential. The first great discovery came at just 10 years of age, when he recognised the unique gifts of his best friend, Alfred Newman's nephew Randy, whom he would later sign and produce.

When Waronker was a teenager, his father saw the studio system collapsing and put up the family's furniture as collateral to fund

the launch of Liberty Records. Initially focused on orchestral and film music, the label moved into the pop market with hits by Julie London and The Chipmunks, and entered the fledgling field of rock'n'roll with Eddie Cochran, Fats Domino and Jan & Dean.

Besotted by the music business, the young Waronker served a long apprenticeship at Liberty before moving to Warner Brothers in 1965. Over the next three decades, Waronker and label head Mo Ostin would build one of the most successful and respected record companies in the world — a rare haven for art and artists in a bottom-line-obsessed industry. In the early '90s, corporate machinations pushed the pair out of the paradise they'd created, and Waronker and Ostin went on to found DreamWorks Records.

These days, Waronker is largely retired and somewhat at a loose end. "One morning you wake up and realise, I don't have to do shit any more," he says, chuckling. "I'm still trying to come to terms with that."

As he reflects on his 70 years of music — as a key facilitator for Brian Wilson and Elliott Smith, The Everly Brothers and Prince — the modest Waronker downplays his contributions. But more than merely bumping into geniuses, Waronker actively sought them out, bringing his deft touch to the careers of cult stars and superstars alike.

"This is a fun way to go back and remember and be part of the stuff you've done," he says, recounting the details from some distant recording session. "When you've been ➤

## WE'RE NOT WORTHY

**Randy Newman on his debt to Lenny Waronker.**



"I used to joke that I didn't have a spine and Lenny was my spine. But he did believe in me before I believed in myself. I always liked pop music, but if it wasn't for him, I

might have gone right into the movies. We're different, but it's a complementary relationship. He was important for me and for a lot of other artists too."



“doing it for as long as I have, you start to forget.”

### Beyond the music you heard hanging out with your father, how much of an influence was it being exposed to the old Hollywood studio system?

The whole concept of the studio system really affected me. The notion that it was like a university or something. Later, at Warner Brothers, Mo [Ostin] and I were both very interested in the studio system and the guys who ran it, so we were always reading biographies about Irving Thalberg, Louis B Mayer, David Selznick. They were studied, that whole scene was studied – what to do, what not to do. In the mid '60s, when I first got to Warners, some of those ideas were still usable. In my mind, I wanted to put together some combination of 20th Century Fox and Motown.

### What was the first music that really affected you?

As a little boy, my mom took me to see *An American In Paris* – the theme to the movie was incredible. And you've got the visual of Gene Kelly and Leslie Caron dancing in this blue, almost psychedelic [backdrop]. I was nine or 10 years old, so sex wasn't like a big thing yet, but it was a little question mark. And when I heard that tune, I said, I think I know what sex is like. Because it got to me that way.

### You played piano as a kid but gave it up early on. I imagine it was hard to feel competent when your best friend happens to be Randy Newman.

Randy and I had the usual relationship that kids have – we played baseball and football and basketball and all that. But the other half of it was music. We would turn each other onto stuff. He's a couple years younger, but he was way ahead of me. Once he really started to focus, he was so far ahead. I'm still taken by his talent – and my own ability to recognise it at such a

young age, and just get the hell out of the way.

One time, each of us was supposed to write a song for something. Maybe his dad wanted us to do it. Anyway, I wrote some stupid poem-like thing, which is all I was capable of. And Randy worked on this piece of music, this instrumental. And when he finally played it, I just knew he was gifted. Because the chord changes, the melody, it didn't feel like it was coming from a kid. He was only seven or eight at the time.

### Your father started Liberty Records in the mid-'50s. For a kid it must've been amazing hanging out with that first generation of rockers like Eddie Cochran.

My father loved Eddie Cochran, thought he was a great musician. Eddie was a really good-looking guy and a glass half-full type, just a lot of energy, and a sweetheart. I was 16 or 17, and my father had a meeting with him. I'm sitting in on this fairly serious meeting with Eddie and his producer/manager Jerry Capehart. Eddie came in to play his new record. I'm in the corner, but close enough to hear. The record starts and it is *perfect*. I mean, everything happened in this little record, it was amazing. Because I had hung out at the record company for a while, I'd picked up some music business jargon. When the record finished, I couldn't control myself and I blurted out, That's *un-fucking-believable!* Eddie looked at me and said, "I want that kid in all my meetings." (Laughs) The record he played was *Summertime Blues*. Can you imagine? Well, something like that will get you hooked on the music business.

### You went to college, but at the same time you were learning the ropes at Liberty – working as a gopher for producer Snuff Garrett, doing radio promotion, and eventually moving to the label's publishing arm Metric Music, where you first started producing.

In those days you had maybe 50 or 60 bucks to make a [songwriting] demo. You could only pay the musicians teeny amounts, but there were

young guys around who wanted in, who were really good. People like Leon Russell and Dr John were making demos. There was plenty of talent to do the work cheap. You couldn't get the big-name session guys and after a while you didn't really want them. So I made a lot of demos and learned how to multi-track, learned how to work with musicians.

### After your move to Warners you had hits for the Mojo Men [*Sit Down, I Think I Love You*] and Harper's Bizarre [*The 59th Street Bridge Song (Feelin' Groovy)*]. But quickly you gravitated towards more esoteric acts, signing your old pal Randy Newman and Van Dyke Parks – what was the attraction there?

I was always interested in working with somebody unique and interesting. Maybe not obviously commercial, but that if they ever got played on the radio, people might jump on it. It was actually Mo who brought up Randy to me. Randy had been a songwriter, but it was clear he needed to be an artist. He already had a big reputation in town with musicians and a handful of producers. Mo came to me and said, "Do you know about this guy Randy Newman?" (Laughs) I said, Yeah, he's my best friend and I've hesitated to say anything to you because he is my best friend. But we went after him and ultimately got him.

When I was at Metric, there was a songwriter I was working with, Rita Martinson, and she said, "I want to play you this song by Van Dyke Parks," and she played me *High Coin*. And I said to her, Rita, your guy didn't write that. That's an old turn of the century number or something. And she really had to convince me. Later, I got a hold of Van Dyke and we had a meeting. He came walking in and was exactly what I had expected – this little genius, somebody who had his own style and was very articulate. Too articulate! He played me six or seven things, that ended up basically being [Parks' 1967 debut] *Song Cycle*. His music was coming from another world. I decided I'm going to sign this guy on

## A LIFE IN PICTURES

Len through a lens: Waronker down the days.

**1** Teen spirit: Lenny Waronker in his Senior Year, University High School, West Los Angeles, 1959.

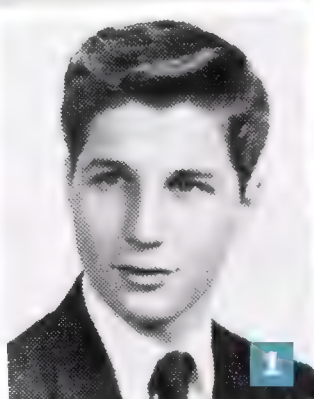
**2** Football fans: Lenny (left) with best friend Randy Newman, circa 1950.

**3** Warner brothers: Waronker (far left) with his Warner A&R team (from left) Andy Wickham, Ted Templeman, Russ Titelman and John Cale.

**4** Going for a song: Waronker (left) with "little genius" Van Dyke Parks, Sunset Sound, Hollywood, November 1966.

**5** In the producer's chair: Waronker in the early '70s – "If I'm in the studio, the first thing I ask is, What's the song look like?"

**6** Captains of industry: Waronker (centre) with record executive Benny Medina (left) and producer Quincy Jones.





the spot. I'm sure we negotiated, but that's when I approached him about it – I said, I think I love you.

**In the early days at Warners, you tried to sign the Buffalo Springfield. Do you think if they'd signed with you instead of Atlantic, their story would have turned out differently?**

At the time I was just a little A&R guy, so it wasn't likely to happen. I mean, Neil Young was the only one that I was able to have any kind of talking relationship with when I was going backstage to see the band. Richie Furay, he was a very nice guy, but he wasn't around. Stephen Stills was dismissive. Dewey Martin was fucked up. And there was Neil. For whatever reason, we became friendly. He was always the guy I would go to. Many years later, after he'd had a tremendous success at Warner/Reprise, Neil told me, "If the Springfield had gone with you, I think the band would still be alive." That was the greatest compliment I ever got.

**In 1968 you produced The Everly Brothers' conceptual country-rock album *Roots*. How tough were they to deal with?**

That was a last-ditch effort because they hadn't had much success in a while. They were at a difficult place with each other too. You could sense the tension. They hadn't written anything – Phil was into Italian love songs. And Don, he was the scary one because he could be explosive. When we were almost finished they said to me, "This is the worst thing we've ever done!" (Laughs) They were going on tour for a little while and I told them, Give me a chance to put it together, and then we'll see what we've got. It didn't end up being a big seller, but it's considered an important record now – and one of the things I'm most proud of.

**Wasn't it on the Everly Brothers project that you connected with Ry Cooder?**

Yeah, I got a call from Jack Nitzsche who said, "I've been working with this guy you have to meet, he's an unbelievable guitar player and we have this idea for a song for the Everlys." I'd heard about Ry Cooder, just the name made me think he was in his thirties or forties. Jack comes in with Ry and he was a kid, 19 or 20. Ry pulled out his guitar and a bottleneck. I didn't even know what a bottleneck was. When I heard him play, I thought, Oh, my God, I've heard that sound before. I always thought it was a harmonica or

**"I'm still taken by Randy's talent – and my own ability to recognise it at such a young age."**

something. Anyway, we never ended up doing the song with the Everlys, but that was the start of things with Ry, who we also signed.

**You made a lot of records with Randy, Ry, and Van Dyke before any of them had hits. You must've met with some resistance within the company. I know there's the famous story of you playing *Song Cycle* for [Warners president] Joe Smith and him saying, "Where's the song?"**

And he wasn't trying to be funny either! Van Dyke will quote that forever happily. (Laughs) I don't know which project it was... it might have been a Randy record or a Ry record or one of the singles that Van Dyke and I kept doing, but I

realised at a certain point that these things are going to be a tough sell. It's like you're climbing a mountain and it's probably vertical. I knew what we were up against. But I really believed it was the right thing to do.

**That kind of belief became part of Warner Brothers' reputation as a label that nurtured and stuck with artists. I suppose that paid off with a group like Fleetwood Mac?**

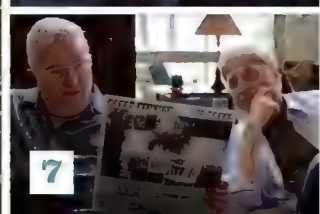
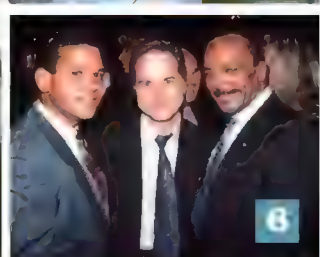
Well, we got lucky there. They'd started with Peter Green and then had a period with Bob Welch. And they'd had a small hit, but they were a kind of mid-level act – mid-level, but good. Though certainly not somebody you'd ever bank on selling 40 million records. But they were making some money for the company, so it seemed stupid to let them go. Not that we were smart enough to know anything about what Lindsey [Buckingham] and Stevie [Nicks] were about to bring to the table. That's all down to Mick [Fleetwood]. But yeah, that was an instance where it certainly paid off. It's still paying off for Warners.

**Along with Russ Titelman, you made some really evocative records in the '70s, particularly Newman's *Sail Away* and *Good Old Boys*. Your cinematic rooting is interesting because your work always had that quality – you can almost see the music as much as hear it.**

In sessions, whenever we would talk about an approach it was always, "What does this track look like?" Even today, if I'm in the studio, the first thing I ask is, What's the song look like?

**Did that philosophy develop into the Warners house style, the so-called 'Burbank Sound'?**

To this day, when people mention the





"There was always a conscious effort to shift gears..." Lenny Waronker at home in Los Angeles, December 2, 2024.



## "Neil Young told me, 'If the Springfield had gone with you, I think the band would still be alive.'"

◀ 'Burbank Sound', I don't know what the fuck they're talking about. It's funny, in [the late '80s] we signed Elvis Costello after he left Columbia. I don't know if you know Elvis – he talks a lot, but what comes out of his mouth is fascinating. We had a dinner and he was talking about how he loved the idea of being on Warners. He was very well-versed in the history of the company and he said he wanted to make a "Burbank Sound" record. And I had to tell him, Elvis, I really don't know what that means. (Laughs)

Maybe it's that we didn't have a single identifiable sound. Russ and I used to talk about it, because he had worked with Phil Spector. Early on, I reached the conclusion that as great as Phil was, Leiber and Stoller were better. One of the reasons was they didn't have a sound, they were just trying different things. If there is a 'Burbank Sound', maybe it's just about changing environments within a record, and not staying the same. There was always a conscious effort to shift gears, sometimes in a

dramatic way, sometimes in a subtle way.

**You were made head of Warners' A&R department in the early '70s. You went on to assemble what's considered the greatest A&R team ever – bringing in musicians and producers like Titelman, Nitzsche, John Cale, Ted Templeman, Gary Katz, Tommy LiPuma...**

I figured if you have A&R people who are creative, who can go in and make records, then good things are going to happen. Our A&R meetings were wonderful, because we didn't talk about shit, we just shared our war stories, and we all had them. I remember one meeting in particular, Ted Templeman was a half hour late. Ted was always soft-spoken, but this was a gruff Ted, who'd clearly been up all night, working on this record with Mike McDonald. Ted said, "This song's got a weird shape and I don't know what to do any more. Will you guys listen to it and see if there's anything to it?" It was

The Doobie Brothers' What A Fool Believes – which ended up being a Number 1 hit and a [Grammy] Song and Record Of The Year. When the track finished, the whole room got up and applauded. And you could just see Ted collapse in relief. It was unbelievable. But without that meeting, who knows? That was the atmosphere we tried to foster.

**Even though you continued to produce hits – for Gordon Lightfoot, James Taylor and Rickie Lee Jones, among others – by the end of '70s you moved away from the studio. Why?**

Producing is hard. For me, the up moments didn't happen enough, and the down moments happened too much. And then there was the boredom – often, you were sitting there just waiting for something to click. I don't know if we had clocks in the studio, but I remember thinking I was always looking at the clock. That was the





beginning of the end for me as a producer.

**In 1982, Mo Ostin made you President of Warner Brothers at a particularly difficult time. The industry was in a massive slump, and you had to jettison several longtime artists including Van Morrison and Bonnie Raitt. Was that a tough transition?**

I had a very difficult time. Literally the first A&R meeting that I'm in as President, we had to drop several artists. Our department hated doing that, because you were admitting that you made a mistake. In my case, I didn't like to drop them because they were friends and I didn't have the heart. I was feeble.

But us 'dropping' Van Morrison was bullshit – he basically had an offer from someone else: Polygram, I think. It was a big offer, and there was no way we were going to match it for a couple of reasons. Not because we didn't believe in him – we knew how good he was. So we said, we'll give him his freedom, let him go get a better deal.

**Of the massive talents that came through Warner Brothers, Prince would presumably be in the top tier?**

The first thing I heard from Prince was a cassette

of eight or nine songs which eventually made up most of his debut album. I couldn't believe it, because in those days, the only one that could really pull that off – meaning playing *everything* – was Stevie Wonder. And in comes this kid, and he's done it.

I remember we took him in the studio just to see what he was doing. I was uptight about it because I didn't want him to think he was auditioning. Because he really wasn't. So we're in the studio and he puts down drums, then an acoustic guitar, and whatever else. Once it started to come together, it was like, "Enough, you don't need to do this. I don't want to waste your time." We were so taken by his talent. And the first indication that something was up with him was his response, which was, "No, I've got to finish. I've got to get the bass part on." He was adamant about it.

Prince was sitting on the floor getting ready to do the bass overdub and there was a little break and I wanted to talk to the engineer, so I had to walk across this cramped little studio floor. I figured if I have to step over or around Prince, I better have something to say. I don't remember what I said, probably, This sounds amazing. But he looked at me and he said, "Don't make me black." Meaning, don't market me that way. Not that we would have. But he was really saying, I'm competing against Fleetwood Mac, Eric Clapton, the

biggest people all across the board. That encapsulated his ambition and his vision, even as an 18- or 19-year-old. His ambition was beyond anything.

**Speaking of mercurial geniuses, you were involved in Brian Wilson's 1988 comeback album. Was that a tricky record to make given he was still in the clutches of his psychiatrist Eugene Landy?**

I hate to say this, but Landy was the worst person I ever met. Landy came in with the idea that everybody thought he was a charlatan – which was true and worse. That was the only time I felt like a politician, because I showed him an enormous amount of respect just to get him out of the way. It was also hard because of Landy's so-called "surf Nazis", these young blond-haired tough guys, who were watching Brian all the time.

I did co-produce [the track] Rio Grande on that album. That's what I thought Brian should be doing, these little mini symphonies in the vein of *Smile*. He was going in the right direction, but it was the height of all the craziness, so it was sort of a missed opportunity.

**In the mid-'90s, you and Mo Ostin left Warner Brothers to launch DreamWorks Records. Of all the artists you signed did Elliott Smith seem like the one destined for greatness?**

It was absolutely clear that he was special. He was someone who was always pushing himself. The first meeting I had with him, he was very shy, and he had an orchestration book with him. Because of my experience with Randy and Van Dyke, I think he knew I'd understand, so he said, "I want to orchestrate my next record." I thought, fantastic, go for it. What I didn't know was just how enormous his musical instincts and his musicality in general was. That's why his [suicide in 2003] was so sad. There's no telling where he would be now.

**At DreamWorks, you tried to recapture what you'd had at Warner Brothers. Why do you think it didn't quite work out ultimately?**

It was a combination of things. There was an amount of money that was being spent at a time when it probably shouldn't have been. And our predictions about sales were always off – I mean, way off. The math of the music business was changing. Because it was the era of Napster and streaming was right around the corner. It was the start of a whole different world.

**Over the last decade or so, you've returned to Warner Music in an emeritus role, and have executive produced records by Dwight Yoakam, Jenny Lewis, and Gary Clark Jr, as well as co-producing Randy Newman's last album, *Dark Matter*, with Mitchell Froom.**

On Randy's record I just came in and gave my two cents and all of a sudden I'm 'co-producing'. I told Mitchell, "You don't need me, you know what you're doing." But it's fun to give him and Randy a little push. Hopefully, if Randy ever gets to the point of making another record, I'll be there. If I'm alive, I'll be there.

**Unlike a lot of record executives, you don't seem particularly concerned about burnishing your legacy. You haven't written the usual self-aggrandising memoir or put yourself out there publicly that much, despite all your achievements.**

I don't like it. I don't like how it looks or smells or anything. It's a disease in a way, worrying about what people are going to say about you – especially after you're gone. It feels like enough people know about what I was a part of. I don't need the whole world to know. Besides, if anyone's really interested, it's all there in the music and the records we made.

M

**BURBANK STATEMENTS**

**Three key Waronker productions – by his nibs.**

**BAROQUE AND ROLL**

**Van Dyke Parks**  
Song Cycle  
(WARNER BROS, 1967)

"Van Dyke was incredibly ambitious musically, and I learned a lot from him. My name is on that record as producer, but spending those eight months working on it was mostly me staying out of the way – and discovering the importance of that when you're dealing with somebody as talented as Van Dyke. Regardless of where it ended up commercially, it's still a record I really cherish."

**BOHO A GO-GO**

**Rickie Lee Jones**  
Rickie Lee Jones  
(WARNER BROS, 1979)

"When we made the first record with Rickie, she was coming out of nowhere, but clearly gifted, really somebody who had it all. She could be incredibly demanding and sometimes over the top, but she was dealing with all these male musicians in the studio. If she had something to say, she'd say it because she had a real sound in mind. Those are the kinds of artists you want to work with."

**THE BESTIE FEST**

**Randy Newman**  
Dark Matter  
(NONESUCH, 2017)

**RANDY NEWMAN**  
**DARK MATTER**

"My friendship with Randy is one thing, but as an artist, the thing I've always admired is his consistency, and the fact that he's still going. In many ways, *Dark Matter* is one of his best. Randy's very serious about what he does. He's probably been conflicted at times just because he knows that his inclinations are difficult for the masses to accept. But he never sells out. He just can't. It's not in him."





**"AS SOON as we  
PLUG in, we'RE  
The SEX PISTOLS"**



Punk's not dead: (from left) Steve Jones, Frank Carter, Paul Cook and Glen Matlock get ready to rumble.



With a tattooed tearaway of a frontman, **STEVE JONES**, **PAUL COOK** and **GLEN MATLOCK** are playing the songs that made their names and shook the world to increasingly demented crowds. Due to **JOHN LYDON**'s objections, they can't bill themselves the **SEX PISTOLS**, yet they insist they're upholding the band's incendiary spirit. "It ain't karaoke," they tell **TOM DOYLE**.

Photograph by **LAURIE LYNN STARK**



SEPTEMBER 26, 2024, AND ON-STAGE at the O2 Forum in Kentish Town, north London, three of the original Sex Pistols are performing with a startling intensity, displaying the fire and skill that always belied the Malcolm McLaren-contrived gimmick that they couldn't play their instruments. As bassist Glen Matlock will put it to MOJO, describing the explosive chemistry between himself, drummer Paul Cook and guitarist Steve

Jones, "As soon as we plug in and start playing, we're the Sex Pistols."

Their new singer, Frank Carter, is halfway up a stage-right staircase, and climbing over a railing onto the lip of a balcony, as he belts out Satellite, the Holidays In The Sun B-side that was John Lydon's ambivalent anthem to the suburban kids in "those godforsaken new towns" where the Pistols sharpened their act with provincial gigs in the first months of '76.

Carter, now 40, was himself a kid when he first picked out the "naughty"-looking *Never Mind The Bollocks, Here's The Sex Pistols* from his dad's CD collection sometime in the '90s. Later, he was schooled in the hardcore punk of the '00s with his band Gallows, in an era which required more Iggy Pop-inspired stage-diving physicality than Johnny Rotten ever dared to attempt.

At the Forum, the tattooed, red-haired frontman gets ready to leap into the crowd, who are noticeably just a touch older than his usual moshpit mobs, then propels himself into the air and is caught and carried aloft by a forest of hands. "I have a very different audience than the Sex Pistols do," he says later, meaning the followers of his current group, Frank Carter & The Rattlesnakes. At shows with the Pistols, he often finds himself in "a circle pit of, y'know, 40-to 60-year-olds... big fucking lads who really want you to prove it".

Reactions to Carter fronting a version of the Sex Pistols in a series of select shows beginning in the summer of 2024 (and now extended to a world tour for 2025) have for the most part been wildly positive. But there have been the naysayers, who've sometimes expressed themselves to the singer in very physical terms.

"I've had a few digs in the ribs," he beams, proudly. "But once you see a guy get punched, and laugh it off, it changes the whole dynamic. Because you just realise that this guy is more unhinged than you thought he was."

"I mean, he's nuts, man, getting in that crowd," Steve Jones quietly marvels.

"He's a little terrier, I tell ya," Paul Cook cackles.

Having such an intrepid, crowd-roaming frontman isn't always a boon, however. Some nights it has led them to losing their place in a song.

"The first night we did Satellite," says Matlock, "it went a bit tits up. Frank was in the middle of the crowd, and we couldn't hear him, and you need to hang off the vocals a little bit sometimes."

"Maybe," the bassist adds with a grin, as a thought suddenly occurs to him, "we should only pay him for the time he's actually on the stage."

"To be honest, if they want to cut my pay, I'll take it," laughs



**"JOHN IS GOING TO HAVE HIS OPINIONS. I'D LOVE TO SIT DOWN WITH HIM AND JUST EXPLAIN TO HIM WHAT HE MEANS TO ME."**  
**FRANK CARTER**



Carter. "This whole situation is priceless to me anyway."

**T**HE ROUTE TO THE Sex Pistols' comeback with Carter – 16 years after their classic line-up of Lydon, Jones, Matlock and Cook played a final re-formation-era gig in Spain in 2008 – was a circuitous one. In the summer of 2023, the guitarist, drummer and bassist all ended up on the same bill supporting Iggy Pop at Crystal Palace Park. Cook and Jones had joined forces and repertoires with Generation X's Billy Idol and Tony James in an outfit savvily named Generation Sex; Matlock was playing bass in Blondie, but missed his erstwhile bandmates' set due to being late to the site. "I could hear the opening notes of Pretty Vacant," he remembers, "but by the time I rushed up there, they'd done it."

Later, Matlock and Cook hung out while Jones, jetlagged after flying in from his adopted home of Los Angeles, returned to his hotel. But, as the bassist reveals, communications between the three had been ongoing as regards future Sex Pistols activity. "We'd been very lightly talking about a way forward," he says.

There were rumours that Steve Jones didn't much enjoy the Generation Sex experience. "It was good... it was good," he states today, without sounding entirely convinced. "I mean, I wouldn't mind doing more of that at some point, but then it kind of ended, and Billy was going to be doing touring or something else. So our manager said, 'Why don't we go out and just do Sex Pistols songs? Find the singer.'"

Then, in 2024, Cook was moved to stage a benefit for Bush Hall, the one-time west London snooker hall-turned-music venue that was facing closure. "The original idea was to get all different singers in to play *Never Mind The Bollocks*," Cook says. "But it would've probably been a bit too much getting five or six different people in."

Instead, Glen Matlock's son, Louis, who along with his brother Sam had toured with the Rattlesnakes in their band Dead!, suggested Carter. "I said, Well, let's meet up for a coffee, and I liked the guy," Matlock Sr recalls. "I said, 'You're up for this? And he said, 'Yep, I'm up for it. I know I'm going to get flak for it, but I've got big boots.' And he rose to the challenge."





Anarchy in the UK: (far left, from left) Sex Pistols' Cook, Jones, Matlock and Johnny Rotten, September 1976; (left) Matlock, Carter, Cook, Jones, Bush Hall, August 14, 2024; (below left) Sex Pistols reunite, 100 Club, 1996.



A load more Bollocks: (top) Sex Pistols with new singer Frank Carter, Kentish Town Forum, September 26, 2024; (above) no future together: Johnny Rotten and Malcolm McLaren in 1977.

"At that point, all I was focused on was having one jam with them," says Carter. "Genuinely. I just was like, I want that for myself. I just want to be in a room with the Pistols and play with them."

Still, after an initial practice session with Cook and Matlock, Carter felt he'd blown his chance due to an attack of nerves. "I honestly thought I'd fucked it up," he says. "It was the worst audition of my life. You think you know those songs. And then when you look at the lyrics... like, Lydon's a genius, but it is *hectic*."

"Maybe he was a bit nervous," Cook says of Carter. "But it didn't come across. He was pretty low-key."

Subsequently, Matlock and Cook told Jones they believed they'd found their man, and the guitarist flew over to London for further rehearsals. "Frank was nervous, even when I got over there," says the guitarist. "He kept forgetting the lyrics... whatever. We just tried to make him feel as comfortable as possible. And then it started falling into place."

At the first of three shows at Bush Hall, on August 13 of last year, Carter proved his worth. "As soon as we stepped on-stage," says Cook, "all hell broke loose. It was so exciting. We went into *Holidays In The Sun*, and it just went off the scale, and it never stopped."

By the time the new line-up returned in September for a five-date UK tour ending at the Forum, two songs from the post-Lydon era of *The Great Rock 'N' Roll Swindle* had crept into the setlist: Cook and Jones's rousing pop-punker, *Silly Thing*, and their propulsive, Sid Vicious-fronted take on *My Way*. "I mean, it's a good song, but it's got connotations," says Matlock of the latter, presumably meaning that it was sung by the man who replaced him in the band. "I kind of go along with it."

For his part, John Lydon has predictably likened the Carter-fronted incarnation of the group to a "karaoke" Sex Pistols. It's a typically harsh put down, but in truth a hollow one. On-stage,

Carter sounds very much like his intense, roaring self, albeit singing Pistols songs.

"He's put his own spin on it, that's for sure," says Cook. "I mean, it'd be ridiculous to try and imitate John anyway. A lot of people have tried in the past and just end up sounding like Steptoe or something. Frank's got a really melodic voice. I think that brings something new to the Pistols, really, without all the shouty-shouty."

"It ain't karaoke," Carter firmly states in his defence. "John is going to have his opinions, and he's very entitled to them. I'd love to sit down with him and just explain to him what he means to me and how grateful I am to... not just hold that torch but pour some gasoline on it."

**R**ECENT YEARS HAVE SEEN RELATIONS BETWEEN John Lydon and his estranged Pistols bandmates plummet to a low only comparable to the fallout of their initial split, following their messy, final phase one gig at the Winterland Ballroom in San Francisco on January 14, 1978. The intervening years of acrimony and recrimination made their eventual reunion, for the Filthy Lucre world tour in 1996, all the more surprising.

Matlock remembers tensions in the air at the band's first rehearsal (after a 19-year break) in Los Angeles that year. "John wouldn't sing," he says. "Steve and Paul got fed up and left, and then I picked up Steve's guitar, and me and John went through the set together. It was a little bit of bonding. I think he was maybe a bit nervous, too."

"If you've spent a lifetime sniping at somebody," he adds with a laugh, "and then you're in a room with the people you've been having a go at, you're probably feeling a little bit cagey."

Steve Jones now says that while money was certainly a key motivator in his decision to rejoin the band, he also felt he had something to prove. "To show people that we could play," he says. "There was always that stigma: 'Oh, them guys can't play.' And I >



“I think we played better than ever on that tour.”

That much was evident from the opening moments of their return show at Finsbury Park on June 23, 1996, when the Pistols kicked into Bodies and the crowd of 30,000 erupted. “That was our first gig back in the UK since ’77, wasn’t it?” Cook double-checks with MOJO. “And it was huge. It was one of my favourite Pistols gigs... we were back on it.”

The Filthy Lucre tour ended after 72 shows, and a further 32 gigs followed in 2008 as part of the cash-reaping Combine Harvester tour. By the end of that jaunt, a chasm had opened up once again between Lydon and the others. “Yeah, not my favourite tour,” Jones attests. “It started getting horrible at the end, y’know, the old resentments. It made me say, Fuck this. I’m never gonna do this again.”

Cook lays the blame on the singer’s dark moods killing the vibe. “It seemed like he was kind of taking revenge a little bit for something that was bugging him,” he says. “Then you just wonder, Why the fuck are we putting ourselves through all this again?”

Matlock has his own theory about Lydon’s deeper feelings re-

garding the Sex Pistols. “I think he resents, in some kind of strange way, having to be Johnny Rotten. Y’know, he wants to be John Lydon, but because of the three of us, he had to become Johnny Rotten and then he sort of painted himself in a corner.”

Steve Jones sees it differently, however.

“No, I don’t think he was resenting being Johnny Rotten,” he counters. “I think John was getting off on being Johnny Rotten. He is Johnny Rotten, y’know.”

In 2021, simmering intra-band grievances spilled over into court. Jones and Cook, with the support of Matlock, overruled their former singer’s objection to having the band’s songs used in Pistol, director Danny Boyle’s polarising 2022 TV miniseries based on Jones’s 2016 memoir, Lonely Boy.

“They don’t need my forgiveness,” Lydon quietly seethed to MOJO in 2023. “They’ve made their decision. Them as people, I don’t need them in my life.” Lydon did, however, admit to having sat through the whole of Pistol. “Yes, I had to. It was grim, grim watching. To see those boys throw away their legacy really, really hurts.”



Shooting stars: (clockwise from left) Sid Vicious winds up the locals, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, January 1978; Rotten and Jones on-stage at Cain’s Ballroom, Tulsa, Oklahoma, January 12, 1978; Cook and friends in San Antonio, Texas; Christian fundamentalists protest.

# AMERICAN hiSTORY: sex

COOK AND JONES ON THE PISTOLS’ CATAclySMIC 1978 US TOUR: NOW ON VINYL! BY TOM DOYLE

IN THE great tradition of the Sex Pistols having little or no control over many of the records released in their name, when MOJO speaks to Steve Jones and Paul Cook about the trio of *Live In The USA 1978* albums being stagger-released between February and April this year, neither of them are even aware of them.

“Fucking news to me,” the guitarist laughs.

“It seems a bit overkill to me,” says the drummer. “I don’t get the thinking behind it.”

Both seem to have deep-sixed their memories of that notorious travelling horror show, involving a Sid Vicious withdrawing from heroin, self-harming and battling

with audience members, John Lydon declaring from the stage at Winterland in San Francisco, “Ever get the feeling you’ve been cheated?” and the ultimate collapse of the band.

“That’s all well hidden in a locker in the back of my memory bank,” says Cook. “Wasn’t the greatest of times.”

Famously, following the cancellation of a show booked at the Leona Theatre in Pennsylvania on December 28, 1977, the band spent the first two weeks of January

’78 taking a swing through the Southern states, playing rough clubs from Atlanta to Memphis, Dallas to Tulsa, where many of the audiences were entirely hostile to them.

“I mean, I get where Malcolm was coming from,” says Jones, in defence of the Pistols’ provocative manager. “Just play these places, don’t do the normal shit.” I totally get it. But, y’know, there was consequences.

You’re playing in front of cowboys who want to kill you.”

One significant feature of the newly spruced-up recordings is Vicious’s sometimes surprisingly capable, but more often ham-fisted bass-playing. Jones and Cook typically sound as if they’re

playing harder and louder, trying to make up for his inadequacies, or drown him out.

“Sid was just out there on his own,” the drummer grimly remembers. “Totally off the rails, off his head. Play-acting down to the punk stereotype. Just being the total destructive force that he could be, really. Me and Steve were

**“SID WAS OUT THERE ON HIS OWN. TOTALLY OFF THE RAILS, OFF HIS HEAD.”**

**PAUL COOK**

always a unit. I always played more along to Steve’s guitar than Sid’s bass anyway.”

“Me and Cookie were just doing our best,” says Jones. “I mean, you couldn’t tell him anything at this point, Sid. He thought he was playing a guitar. He would strum it like it’s a power chord or something. He didn’t realise you got to keep pumping, y’know.”

“But it wasn’t even about a bass guitar at this point. It was so chaotic. And he just wanted to, you know, give it the big ‘un. This was part of the falling apart of it all, because me and Cookie were sick of playing it like that. It was just a shambles and not cool.”

Still, the guitarist is intrigued to hear the three live LPs. “I’ll go and buy some,” he jokes, drily. “Maybe they’ll give me a discount.”





As it turns out, Matlock didn't much like Pistol, either. "I was a bit embarrassed, really," he admits, having taken particular exception to the reinforcement of the narrative that he was kicked out of the band. He still insists he quit.

"The way Glen was portrayed in it, I didn't really agree with that," says Cook. "That was the main beef, really. I thought that was quite bad. And I just thought the whole thing could have been a bit more down and dirty than how it was. A bit grittier, really."

"I would say I was 90 per cent happy with it," says Jones, while claiming that he can't clearly remember the details of Matlock's departure. He points out that Cook recently reminded him that the pair of them "went away to the Canary Islands for a week, and when we come back, Glen had gone. I know me and Cookie just went along with it. I don't think we had a lot of input in it."

"I didn't see eye to eye with John and there you go," says Matlock, who of course was to enjoy his moment of vindication when he was asked back into the band in 1996.

"I don't want it to come across nasty," he stresses, "but when the Pistols re-form, they could get anybody who's pretty good on the bass to do it. And they always ask me. So I kind of feel I have the last laugh a little bit, really. Not in a snide way. But in a kind of, Yeah, that'll do nicely, kind of way."

Lydon himself has been through a tough time of late: losing his wife Nora Forster in April 2023, followed by the death of his friend and manager John 'Rambo' Stevens later the same year. Cook says the band attempted to reach out to him: "We did try around that time, but didn't get no response."

"It's very sad," says Matlock. "There's people writing to me, y'know, 'You should speak to John!' and all that. Well, my dad died of Alzheimer's. Nobody called me. Two wrongs don't make a right. But what can you do?"

"He lost his missus, and he lost his best mate, which has got to be rough," Jones sympathises. "I wish him all the best, John. I've got no agg with him."

**W**HICH BEGS THE QUESTION: WITH THE PISTOLS expected to be a big international live draw in 2025, what would the others say if – in a surprise twist – Lydon decided that he wanted back in the band? "I wouldn't believe him," Matlock instantly responds.

"You'd definitely make a lot more dosh," Jones pragmatically points out. "But is it worth it? If it's going to be that same old bullshit, y'know. You never know though... things change... people change."

"I don't think that'll ever happen," Cook says of the chances of a full Pistols reunion. "But if it ever does, we'll come to that when it does happen."

One person who'd be dismayed by this (albeit improbable) development, of course, is Frank Carter. "I would be disappointed," he offers. "Of course I would. But, look, if that ever was to happen, I would just take the thanks from the rest of the world. Because what an honour to be part of that getting back together."

In the meantime, there are other possibilities to consider, including a live Frank Carter/Sex Pistols album. "Yeah, why not?" Jones says. "You definitely wouldn't have to overdub the crowd noise, that's for sure."

More contentious is the notion that the four might also explore



He's doing it his way: Frank Carter and the Sex Pistols come together in London, 2024.

**"RE-FORMING WITH JOHN? YOU'D MAKE A LOT MORE DOSH. BUT IS IT WORTH IT? IF IT'S GOING TO BE THAT SAME OLD BULLSHIT." STEVE JONES**

writing new material. Opinions about that vary within the band. "There were a couple of ideas floating around in '96 which John wouldn't write lyrics for," Matlock discloses. "I think they still could

slot in, y'know, but we'll see."

"I think that was 2008," says Jones. "When we were rehearsing, we had a couple of ideas... It was just a couple of riffs or whatever, but nothing happened with them."

"I think I used them on the Professionals album actually," Cook laughs, meaning 2017's *What In The World* by the band he started with Jones in 1979 and then revived with most of its original members in 2015.

Frank Carter is, at least in theory, open to the idea of writing new 'Sex Pistols' lyrics, even if he has one likely deal-breaking condition. "I would do it, of course," he says. "It wouldn't be the Sex Pistols, obviously, unless I could sit down and write the lyrics with John. But again, that's just opening a can of worms. There's so much history between them, and it's delicate ground."

"For me personally, I think when a band like us starts playing new material, that's when everyone goes to the fucking bar," offers Jones, bluffly. "They're not interested."

And on recent evidence, there are not many queuing for drinks when Frank Carter and the Sex Pistols are up on-stage and in such fiery form. For now, the band are more than happy to celebrate the immaculate canon of *Never Mind The Bollocks* (and ancillary) songs, live and loud and with an infusion of new frontman energy.

"It's been really, really fun to talk to their friends and family," says Carter. "People come up to me and they just give me a big old shake, and they'll tell me, 'I've never seen them this happy... never seen so many smiles on the stage.'"

"I just think, Fuck, that's what it's all about. If you're going to be doing this, like, 50 years on, if you ain't smiling, why the fuck are you up there?"

Moreover, reckons Carter, now as then, the band exists as an essential lightning rod for people's rage.

"To me," he states, with the insider knowledge of a fan-turned-frontman, "now is the time we need a band like the Pistols more than ever."

Frank Carter and Paul Cook, Steve Jones and Glen Matlock of the Sex Pistols play the Royal Albert Hall in aid of Teenage Cancer Trust on March 24, plus festivals across the UK in 2025.



**Michelle Zauner is the best-selling author behind the sublime, eclectic indie-pop of *JAPANESE BREAKFAST* – now featuring new pals Blake Mills, Jim Keltner and Jeff Bridges. With late-blooming fame informed by a traumatic bereavement, she's in a hurry to create. "I feel like there's so little time," she tells **DORIAN LYNKEY**.**

Photography by **PAB WAX**

**A**S A TEENAGER IN EUGENE, OREGON, MICHELLE ZAUNER'S MUSICAL ambitions were modest. She dreamt of touring in a van, staying in Holiday Inns and maybe, one day, headlining the 1,500-capacity Crystal Ballroom in Portland. "That place felt enormous to me," she says, sitting cross-legged on the floor of her Brooklyn apartment, all in black, a wall of art behind her. "I'm so far beyond what I could have ever hoped for."

By the time she turned 33 in March 2022, she appeared to have made it. *Jubilee*, her colourfully pop-minded third album as Japanese Breakfast, was up for two Grammy awards. Crying In H Mart, her memoir about food, Korean-American identity and the loss of her mother to cancer, spent more than a year on the New York Times bestseller list. Time magazine named her one of the 100 most influential people in the world.

Yet all this recognition was proving discombobulating, she confessed to Wilco's Jeff Tweedy in a conversation for Interview magazine: "I've been feeling a little lost. I feel like I've hit my peak and it's all downhill from here."

Zauner hoots when she's reminded of the quote. She is warm and energetic company, with a bright, brilliant laugh. "Why do I think that way? As soon as something great happens, I'm certain that I'll enter my flop era. I never anticipated that much attention and praise so I'm certain that it's over." She pauses. "Hopefully it's not."

Zauner has identified each Japanese Breakfast album with a core emotional theme: 2016's *Psychopomp* was grief, 2017's *Soft Sounds From Another Planet* was trauma, and *Jubilee* was joy. The heart of her fourth, *For Melancholy Brunettes (And Sad Women)*, is, as advertised, melancholy: "a romantic quality but also an eeriness," she says. Recorded at Sound City in Los Angeles with producer Blake Mills, it's a reaction to being "this joyful frontwoman bouncing around" on *Jubilee*. She wanted to get back to playing guitar and looking inward.

She picks out two favourite lyrics. One is from the dreamy West Coast lament Winter In LA: "I wish you had a happier woman/One that could leave the house."







Portrait of the artist:  
Japanese Breakfast's  
Michelle Zauner,  
South Korea, 2024.





**"I THOUGHT OK, THAT'S IT, I HAVE TO GET A REAL JOB NOW. I'M JUST TOO OLD FOR THIS TO HAPPEN."**

MICHELLE ZAUNER

“I’m very not an LA kind of person,” she explains. “I always get depressed when I’m there. I get really confused when I feel gloomy and it’s so nice out. I was thinking about all these amazing musicians – Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Bob Dylan – who have had these really fruitful LA years. I was like, What is *wrong* with me? Why do I have to suffer through everything?”

The other line is from the sparkling album closer *Magic Mountain*: “Chained to my reflection in the shadow of a mountain.”

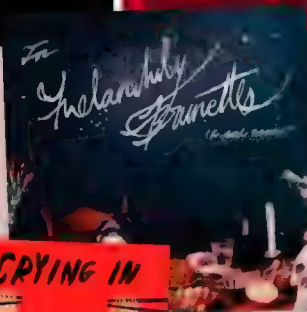
“It encapsulates how I feel as a musician at work,” she says. “It’s a self-absorbed profession. I want to make stuff and leave something behind but I also don’t want to forget to live my life and be happy and take care of the people around me. A lot of the record is about that contradiction. How do I find the balance?”

How’s the balance working out right now?

She cracks up. “Not great!”

AS SOON AS SHE FINISHED *FOR MELANCHOLY Brunettes*... , Zauner used her second book advance to fund a year with her aunt in Seoul, where she learned to speak Korean and worked on the videos and artwork for the album. “I was scared to do it but I’m really glad that I did,” she says. “It was a beautiful experience.”

Zauner’s parents, Joel and Chongmi, met in Seoul in the 1980s, when her American father was selling cars to the US military, and moved to Oregon when she was a baby. These days, an American teenager might watch *Parasite* and *Squid Game*, listen to K-Pop and eat kimchi, but back then, she says, Korea was a blank space in the American imagination. “In middle school, kids didn’t even know Korea was a country! I think Eugene was, like, 98 per cent white.” The only prominent Korean-American in indie music, Karen O of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, became a lodestar.



Zauner began writing songs at 16 with a cunning plan to secure support slots at shows she wouldn’t otherwise be allowed to attend. Her youthful output was sad and confessional, influenced by Elliott Smith, Joanna Newsom and Modest Mouse. Music represented both a way to find herself and a world into which she might escape. “I was an only child,” she says. “My mom was a stay-at-home mom. We lived in the woods. We were very on top of each other.”

Zauner suffered a nervous breakdown in her last year at high school but won a place at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, where she majored in creative production, got tattoos and formed an emo band called

Little Big League. The band went nowhere and its fatherly bass player Devin Craig (‘the Mick Fleetwood of the band’) had just quit when Zauner was summoned back to Eugene by her mother’s cancer diagnosis in May 2014. The two women had been rebuilding their relationship but it was cruelly snatched away. Within five painful, humiliating months, Chongmi was gone. Zauner was just 25.

“It’s a weird age,” she says. “You’re not so young that it’s unimaginably tragic but you’re not old enough to know how to handle it. There’s no easy age to lose a parent but it’s a weird middle ground for sure.”

She had abandoned musical ambitions. After recording *Psychopomp*, lo-fi yet lush indie-pop, as a form of therapy in the weeks after the funeral (her mother appears on the cover), she took a 9-to-5 job selling advertising space in New York. “I thought, OK, that’s it, I have to get a real job now. I’m just too old for this to happen. I thought I’d do music on the side and I might have a quiet indie following of Bandcamp people that I write letters to.”

Instead, she got laid off after a year and used the severance payment to take up an unexpected opportunity to play South By Southwest. She promptly landed a deal with Dead Oceans and an offer to tour with Mitski. “I think this happens to a lot of people,” she notes. “Your swan song is the one that saves you.”

She assembled a touring line-up: Craig Hendrix on drums, a





Seoul power: (clockwise from left) young Michelle with her mother Chongmi, 1990; Zauner signs copies of her best-selling memoir, *LA*, 2023; Little Big League, 2013 (from left) Zauner, Deven Craig, Ian Dykstra, Matt O'Halloran; with husband Peter Bradley, New York, 2022.



## THE BREAKFAST SERIAL

Michelle Zauner: the sonic story so far, by Dorian Lynskey.

(*Yellow K/Dead Oceans*, 2016)



The lo-fi haze of Zauner's home-recorded debut can't conceal the strength of her hooks, the fullness of her arrangements or the breadth of her sound, from haunted instrumentals to Everybody Wants To Love You's arms-wide dream-pop. Named after the spirit that escorts the souls of the deceased to the afterlife, the title track features Zauner's mother on voicemail: "Don't cry honey, I love you."

(*Dead Oceans*, 2017)



Her intended sci-fi concept album didn't pan out but this bittersweet journey through love and trauma still displays cosmic ambitions, free-wheeling through space-disco, shoegaze and Wilco-indebted motorik rock as her themes range from frustrated ambition (Jimmy Fallon Big!) to robot romance (Machinist). A radically improved reimagining of Little Big League's Boyish illuminates the distance she's travelled.

(*Dead Oceans*, 2021)

"How's it feel to stand at the height of your powers?" Zauner asks ambivalently amid the chamber-pop fireworks of Paprika. Inspired by the bursting confidence of Björk's third album, *Homogenic*, it's a lush, ascendant record: tighter, brighter, aglow with charisma. Rhythm is king on tracks like Be Sweet, her purest pop song yet, while Tactics swoons like a Hollywood musical.

(*Dead Oceans*, 2021)



Zauner's largely instrumental soundtrack to *Sable*, an exploration game set on a desert planet, extrapolates her previous records' fleeting ambient interludes into a movie-length soundscape whose exotic twists and turns call to mind *Boards of Canada* or the back halves of Bowie's *Low* and *"Heroes"*. Liberated from autobiography for the first time, she proves her chops as a sonic storyteller.



intuition is king. But I wanted a producer that was going to challenge me."

The lyrics are her most intricately literary yet. Resembling a collection of short stories, with references to Greek mythology, John Cheever and Thomas Mann, they unite her two careers. "It's funny," she says. "When you're in book world and people ask you about music it's like, no, no, no, I'm a writer, don't ask me to perform! Now I'm promoting a record I'm like, I'm a musician, how dare you?"

She pokes fun at herself. "Who could be mad? They're both dream jobs."

Quite the polymath, Zauner has cameoed in the cult sitcom *Search Party*, recorded a song for the Marvel series *Agatha All Along* and recorded the soundtrack to the video game *Sable*. She also directs all of Japanese Breakfast's videos and has written a screenplay for *Crying In H Mart*, though the film version is currently in limbo.

"I have so many ideas," she says, "and I feel like there's so little time."

Why is that?

"Because of death!" she exclaims, as if it's obvious. "Both my mom and my aunt died very young so it's in my family that I might not have much time. And I've had friends die too, even younger, for totally bizarre reasons. So I want to make as much stuff as I can before it's over." **M**

*For Melancholy Brunettes (And Sad Women) is reviewed on page 84.*

returning Deven Craig on bass and, eventually, her husband Peter Bradley on guitar. "I would never tour this much if I didn't have my husband with me," she says. "It's so hard and so lonely, I don't know how people do it without having their best friend in the band."

Without her mother's death, she realises, none of this — the band, the book, the fame — would have happened. "It's a double-edged sword," she says, frowning. "I'm really glad that I had a life raft that made meaning out of this horrible thing. But yeah, gosh, I wish my mom could see me become successful."

**Z**AUNER IS A KEEN STUDENT OF her favourite artists' careers. This time, she considered the purpose of fourth albums: Björk's *Vespertine*, Wilco's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, Radiohead's *Kid A*. "I've always felt like the fourth record is your experimental fuck you: I'm just going to do something weird and me."

On the road, Japanese Breakfast are a conventional band with a stable line-up but in the studio anything goes. Blake Mills is a fiendishly well-connected session guitarist to the stars, whose contacts led to guest appearances by Jeff Bridges ("super cool") and drummers Jim Keltner and Matt Chamberlain.

"When I need a drummer, I call someone I know who plays drums," Zauner says drily. "I don't call someone who drummed on *Dream Weaver*."

While the veterans' creds (including Keltner's part in Gary Wright's synth soft rock smash) had her pinching herself, Zauner's first experience in a proper studio with a proper producer wasn't all smooth sailing. "Blake is not interested in the obvious choice and sometimes that was really hard for me," she says. "I'm like,



From me to you:  
John Lennon and Paul  
McCartney get better  
and better, Paris, 1964.





# A RIGHT PAIR

Two halves of one brain, **JOHN LENNON** and **PAUL MCCARTNEY** formed the most extraordinary and intimate musical partnership of the rock era. In this extract from a new book that probes their bond through the medium of their songs, Ian Leslie discovers how one of them, *Sgt. Pepper's Getting Better*, was a case of Paul reaching out to John, changed but also estranged by his new love... LSD.

**O**N THE EVENING OF MARCH 21, 1967, three of The Beatles were at Abbey Road, recording backing vocals for a song called *Getting Better*. John, Paul and George were gathered around a microphone. After a few run-throughs, John took out a silver snuff box he kept his pills in and began poking around in it, searching for an upper to keep him going. Soon afterwards, he faltered and stopped in the middle of a line. He looked up to George Martin in the control room. "George, I'm not feeling too good," he said. "I'm not focusing on me."

Martin paused the session and took John up to the roof for some fresh air. The other Beatles stayed behind. But as McCartney and Harrison discussed what might be the matter with John, they figured out that he had probably taken a tab of LSD by accident – and that maybe standing on the top of a building wasn't the best place for him. They rushed up the stairs, hoping that John did not decide to see if he could fly before they got there. As it turned out, he was OK. Still, work was halted for the night, and the band dispersed.

Paul and John stayed together. With the drug exerting its effects on his brain, John didn't want to travel back to his home in Surrey. He and Paul headed for Paul's house on Cavendish Avenue, a short drive from the studio. Once there, Paul decided he would take some LSD himself. Although he had tried acid for the first time in late 1965, that was with other friends. Now he wanted to "get with John", as he later put it to Martin, who interpreted it to mean "to be with him in his misery and fear". McCartney told Barry Miles: "I thought... maybe this is the moment. It's been coming for a long time."

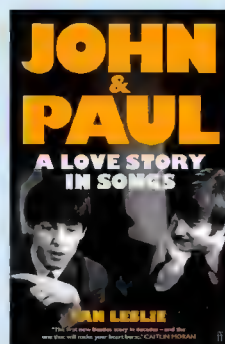
That night, John and Paul did something that the two of them practised quite a few

times during this period: they gazed intensely into each other's eyes. They liked to put their faces close together and stare, unblinking, until they felt themselves dissolving into each other, almost obliterating any sense of themselves as distinct individuals. "There's something disturbing about it," recalled McCartney, much later, in his understated way. "You ask yourself, How do you come back from it? How do you then lead a normal life after that? And the answer is, you don't." The Beatles' publicist and friend Derek Taylor recalled Paul enthusing about LSD: "We had this fantastic thing... Incredible, really, just looked into each other's eyes... Like, just staring and then saying, 'I know, man,' and then laughing."

**J**OHN AND PAUL WERE GETTING TOWARDS the end of their work on what had become the *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album. They were working on what they called "slog songs". "The last four songs of an album are usually pure slog," Paul told Hunter Davies, around this time. "If we need four more we just have to get down and do them. They're not necessarily worse than ones done out of imagination. They're often better, because by that stage in an LP we know what sort of songs we want."

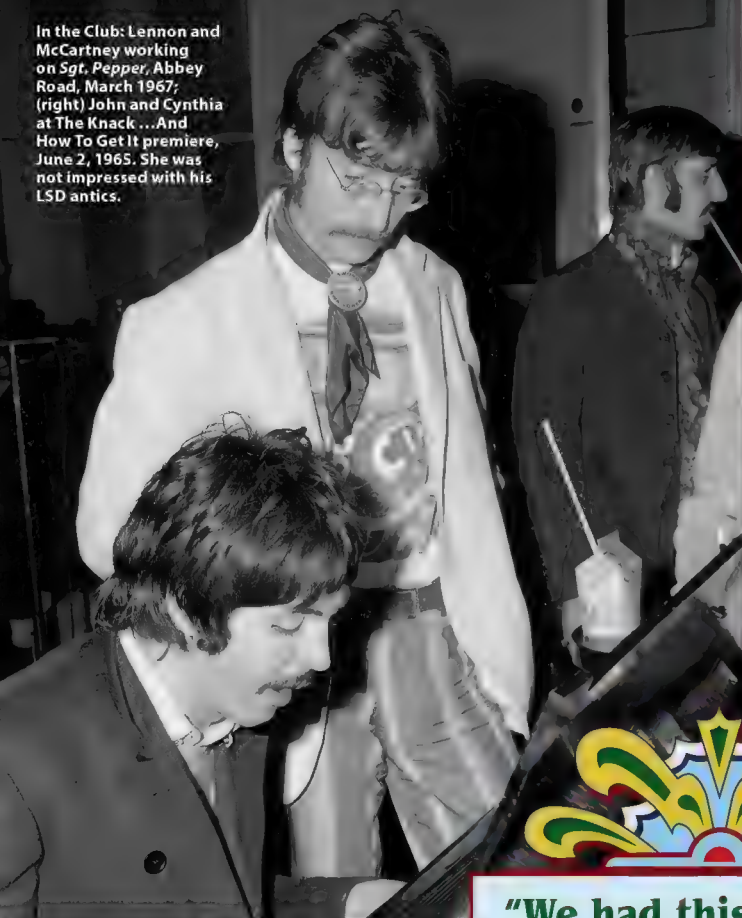
By songs "done out of imagination", Paul meant those that one or the other of them already had floating around before sessions on an album began – like Eleanor Rigby, Tomorrow Never Knows or A Day In The Life. Those songs arrived unbidden and were sometimes fragmentary or unfinished. Once the group had realised those ones in the studio, they usually needed a few more, and often had a tight deadline. So John and Paul would meet up, usually around two in the afternoon, and knock out the slog songs.

It was like the difference between ➤





In the Club: Lennon and McCartney working on *Sgt. Pepper*, Abbey Road, March 1967; (right) John and Cynthia at The Knack... And How To Get It premiere, June 2, 1965. She was not impressed with his LSD antics.



**"We had this fantastic thing... Just looked into each other's eyes... just staring and then saying, 'I know, man,' and then laughing."**

**PAUL MCCARTNEY**

◀ letting inspiration strike and trying very hard to have a new idea. On that basis, you might expect the slog songs to sound more formulaic and less interesting. But because John and Paul were so relaxed in each other's company, they were able to tap into each other's unconscious and find surprises there. In 1967, the journalist Hunter Davies got as close as any outsider did to witnessing this process. He was at McCartney's house as John and Paul worked on a song for Ringo. They had composed the melody the day before. They had a title, too: With A Little Help From My Friends. Davies describes the two of them in a seemingly aimless, almost trance-like state. They would "bang away" artlessly on guitars, or Paul would sit at the piano. They'd throw out musical and lyrical phrases until something that one of them did or said snagged, at which point the other would "pluck it out of a mass of noises and try it himself".

As Davies watches, they land on the idea of asking a question at the start of each verse. At this point Cynthia Lennon turns up with one of their old Liverpool friends, Terry Doran. Cynthia and Terry sit down, chat quietly, suggest lines when invited to and read out the horoscope, while Paul and John carry on doodling. Paul suddenly starts to play *Can't Buy Me Love*. John joins in, "singing it very loudly, laughing and shouting". Paul plays *Tequila* at the piano, and they go crazy again. "Remember in Germany?" says John. "We used to shout out anything." John and Paul play through their song but with John shouting random words between the lines: "knickers", "Hitler", "tit", "Duke of Edinburgh". It's the kind of moment familiar to anyone who has watched *Get Back*. This period of boisterous play stops as soon as it began. They return to the song, now very focused, and speaking softly. John finds just the right words to make a line he has been working on scan. Paul nods, says, "Yes, that will do," and writes down the finished verse on notepaper.

DAVIES WAS ALSO AROUND to see how *Getting Better* came into being. McCartney had been at home with time to kill. John was meant to be coming over to work on new songs, but he was late and it was a nice day, so Paul picked up Martha, the sheepdog he had acquired the previous summer, put her in his Mini Cooper and drove to Primrose Hill. As Martha frolicked in the park and the sun came out for the first time in a while, Paul

thought, "It's getting better," and smiled. The phrase reminded him of something Jimmie Nicol used to say. Nicol was the drummer who joined the band for a few weeks in 1964 when Ringo fell ill. Whenever one of the Beatles asked Nicol how he was finding it, he'd reply, "It's getting better." The Beatles found this hilarious.

When John arrived at Cavendish Avenue later that afternoon, Paul said, "Let's do a song called *Getting Better*." They began strumming and improvising and larking around until a song began to form. "You've got to admit," said Paul, after a while, "it is getting better" — and John started to sing that. The two of them kept going like this until two in the morning, stopping only for a fry-up, as a succession of visitors who had made appointments to see Paul were left waiting or sent away. Into this song, initiated by Paul, John poured a stream of reflections on his own life: on the anger he had carried around with him as a teenager and younger man; on the emotional and physical abuse he had inflicted on women. Since the tone of the song is light-hearted, the heaviness of the final verse is often missed.

The evening after this session, John and Paul went to the studio. Paul played *Getting Better* on a piano for George and Ringo. The group sat around and discussed what the song should sound like, before dispersing to noodle on their instruments, trying out bits and pieces to play. Paul joined Ringo at the drums and helped him work out his part. After a couple of hours, they were ready to record the backing track. George Martin took his position in the con-





Acid house: (above) Lennon surrenders to the void, Kenwood, Surrey, 1967; (below) the Fab5 with Ringo stand-in Jimmie Nicol, whose catchphrase was "it's getting better".



tol room. The Beatles ran through seven takes, with Paul directing the group ("Once more"; "More drums"; "Less bass"). By midnight they had a satisfactory version. Twelve days later, they recorded the lead and backing vocals (this was the session interrupted by John's LSD-induced freak-out). Two days after that, reported Hunter Davies, they were back in the studio to redo the vocals, finishing when "they'd got it at least to a stage which didn't make them unhappy".

**P**EOPLE WHO KNEW JOHN commented on a change in his personality that took place in 1966 and 1967, roughly coinciding with his use of pot and LSD. In early 1968, Cynthia told Hunter Davies that John was quieter and more tolerant than he used to be. His old schoolmate Pete Shotton also noticed a distinct softening of John's personality: the 'cripple' impersonations stopped, the sarcasm receded. He was no longer drinking himself into oblivion and rage. His songwriting moved past the *Sturm und Drang* of love betrayed and spurned. He became calmer, nicer and more childlike. He even started hugging people. "This is the new thing," John said, on hugging a friend he hadn't seen in a while. "You hug your friends when you meet them, and show them you're glad to see them." He also stopped worrying about McCartney taking leadership of the group. As Lennon relaxed, McCartney became even more driven. Although Paul had now taken LSD with John, his drug of choice during the *Pepper* sessions was cocaine. In the studio, after the others had clocked off, he would work through the night, crafting his bass lines, obsessing over every detail of each track.



## HEAD TO HEAD

FIVE MORE TIMES JOHN AND PAUL'S INTERPLAY MADE A GOOD SONG GREAT.

### IF I FELL

(*A Hard Day's Night*, 1964)



Lennon and McCartney share vocals on *AHDN*'s not-so-secret weapon, evidence of how 'Paul' the song's primary writer, John, could be when he chose. Neither a conventional vocal/BV combo, nor a duet, John and Paul's lines weave, writes Ian Leslie, "like a courtship dance".

### IN MY LIFE

(*Rubber Soul*, 1965)



As Leslie notes, the song Lennon and McCartney subsequently disagreed most about as to who wrote what. They're John's lyrics – an autobiographical precursor to *Strawberry Fields Forever*. Paul later laid claim to the melody: "a bit bluesy, with the minors and little harmonies."

### TOMORROW NEVER KNOWS

(*Revolver*, 1966)



Still impossible to fully comprehend how the pair conceived this, even when you know the full story of John's spectral acid demo transformed by Paul-instigated tape experiments. Not just John *plus* Paul, but the invention of a Beatle entity that was both *them* and *beyond* them.

### A DAY IN THE LIFE

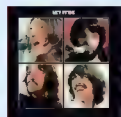
(*Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, 1967)



The best example of the John-Paul yin and yang, what with the 'John bit' and the 'Paul bit' being tantamount to two different songs – albeit linked by a theme of profound inner reflection – collaged together. Post-Beatles, John songs would miss Paul's levity, and Paul songs lack John's intensity.

### TWO OF US

(*Let It Be*, 1970)



Paul wrote this after a car journey with Linda, but it's hard not to parse as a flashback to the heyday of Lennon and McCartney's partnership, especially when you watch Paul and John croon it *à deux* in *Get Back*. "Get a room!" you can almost see Harrison thinking, just before he does a bunk.

Danny Eccleston

**ON THE TURN:  
INSIDE THE  
NEW JOHN &  
YOKO DOC!**

John's drug-enabled placidity came at a cost. He was taking acid frequently now, sometimes with a group of hangers-on that he would invite back to Kenwood after a night out in the clubs. Cynthia and Julian got used to strangers in the house. "They'd wander round, glassy-eyed, crash out on the sofas, beds and floors, then eat whatever they could find in the kitchen," Cynthia wrote in her memoir. "John was an essentially private man, but under the influence of drugs he was vulnerable to anyone and everyone who wanted to take advantage of him." John's use of LSD put an ever-greater distance between him and Cynthia. In the spring of 1967, he invited Pete Shotton to move into Kenwood, primarily so that he would have someone to take it with.

The first time they took it together was at Julian's fourth birthday party. After that, John would bring a mug of tea and a tab of acid to Shotton's room every morning.

Not surprisingly, John's productivity suffered. He had never found it so hard to create new songs. Other than *A Day In The Life*, only three of the songs on *Sgt. Pepper* were initiated by him: *Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds*, *Being For The Benefit Of Mr. Kite!* and *Good Morning Good Morning*. Even on those, McCartney was the midwife. Although John claimed *Kite* as his, McCartney remembers being at John's house, pointing to the circus poster that inspired it and helping John turn its copy into lyrics. Paul co-wrote *Lucy*, too. The number of co-created Lennon and McCartney songs on *Pepper* (at least six feature significant writing contributions from both of them) is testament to their closeness at this time, but also to how much Paul was now having to coax songs out of his partner.

Nobody, not even John, believed more in John's talents than Paul, or was more deeply invested in him making the most of them. McCartney also wanted his friend to be happy. He could see that John was calmer than he had been. He could also see that John was unmoored. When John wasn't working, he was tripping. Left to drift aimlessly, he might lose himself altogether. By choosing to take LSD with him, Paul was giving John a chance to take the upper hand in at least one aspect of their relationship – to play the role of psychedelic guide – while ensuring that the drug's mind-expanding properties were channelled into creativity.

In *Getting Better*, Paul nudged John into creating a kind of self-help narrative of his own life, sung, paradoxically, by Paul. The narrative is commented on, wispishly, by John ("fool, you fool!"), playing a Greek chorus in the drama of his own maturation. The singer has been helped to put aside the self-loathing and rage of his youth by, well, someone. His realisation is arrived at grudgingly, as something he has to admit, just as you might acknowledge a friend who often annoys you but who is busy saving you from yourself.

John & Paul: *A Love Story In Songs* by Ian Leslie is published by Faber & Faber on March 27. £25 hardback, £14.99 ebook.





Together stronger: John and Yoko on-stage at Madison Square Garden, NYC, August 30, 1972.

# TEMPERATURE'S RISING

A new film about John Lennon and Yoko Ono's radical 1971-73 is full of fear, intimacy and great music. "I was completely floored," Sean Lennon tells Danny Eccleston.

IT'S 1972 and John Lennon is talking to drummer Jim Keltner on the phone, about a tour he's planning that will end in Miami Beach to coincide with a protest at August's Republican National Convention. The ex-Beatle's ongoing challenge to President Nixon and the US political establishment has him buzzing, but Keltner sounds a note of concern. Does Lennon realise he's playing with fire? Has he considered the risks?

Lifted from a recently discovered box of tapes, the audio is one of the stars of *One To One: John & Yoko*, Kevin Macdonald and Sam Rice-Edwards' vivid and visceral new film about Lennon and Yoko Ono's period of controversial activism, 1971-73. The pair's recorded phone conversations with Keltner, Allen Klein, MCA manager John Sinclair and more provide some of the film's most surprising insights. One viewer was particularly struck.

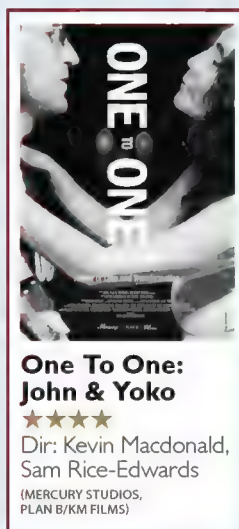
"I was completely floored," Sean Lennon tells MOJO. "I think maybe not everyone realises how special it is for me to hear my dad talking or to see him. I grew up with a set number of images and audio clips that everyone's familiar with. So to come across things that I've never seen or heard is really deep for me, because it's almost like getting more time with my dad."

*One To One* is full of such moments of surprising connection with the Lennons. The phone recordings provide what co-director Kevin Macdonald describes as one of the film's "spines"; the other is restored footage of the one full live show Lennon performed as a solo artist: the Madison Square Garden benefit for Staten Island's Willowbrook special needs school on August 30, 1972. Backed

by their New York pick-up band Elephant's Memory, with Keltner on second kit, Lennon and Ono deliver searing performances of *Come Together*, *Cold Turkey*, *Mother*, *Don't Worry Kyoko* and more. After decades of mixed reviews for this period of Lennon's music-making – encompassing *Some Time In New York City* and our previous best version of the Willowbrook show, the 1986 release of *Live In New York City* – it's another revelation.

"To be honest, I don't know what was going on that day, but the recording was very chaotic," says Sean Lennon, who presided over the gig's new audio mix, battling random mike placements, tidying flammy drums and foregrounding Lennon's vocals. "Dad's amazing at that show," he continues. "Specifically, his voice, it's got grit to it. Let's just say, if I was in a band with John Lennon, I wouldn't solo over his voice when he's singing," Lennon chuckles. "Let's just put it that way."

COLLAGED TV footage of contemporary events contextualises the Lennons' activism – Carole Feraci of the super-square Ray Conniff Singers unveiling a *Stop The Killing* banner at a White House concert – and you empathise with their idealism. "Flower power didn't work," says Lennon, "but so what – we start again." Yet the film doesn't flinch from the less savoury aspects



## One To One: John & Yoko

★★★★

Dir: Kevin Macdonald, Sam Rice-Edwards

(MERCURY STUDIOS, PLAN B/KM FILMS)

of their radical allies: Jerry Rubin, who wants to empty the prisons; A.J. Weberman, who roots through Bob Dylan's garbage for evidence of his betrayal of The Movement (and syringes).

"To me, ultimately, the message of the film is that they were very brave, John and Yoko, to go from singing songs to hanging out with the Chicago Seven, hanging out with the Black Panthers, and becoming real radical activists," says Sean Lennon.

"But you see that it goes too far. And you can feel that my dad is scared. I think a lot of people today remember my dad's activism as aligning with the Jerry Rubins. But he moves beyond that when he realises they're violent too, or they want to be violent. And it's a cold splash of water in the face."

Ultimately, it transpired that Lennon was right to be scared. The clicks and whirrs that we hear on the phone recordings really were FBI taps, and while the Lennons deployed private investigators to track down Yoko's estranged daughter Kyoko they briefed lawyers to counter threats of deportation. A higher profile in 1972's election campaign could conceivably have ended as it did for segregationist Democrat George Wallace – paralysed after taking four shots in Laurel, Maryland on May 15.

More than anything, *One To One* is a snapshot of a man on a voyage of self-discovery. What was John Lennon, if no longer a Beatle? For now, he was a revolutionary. Later, he'd be a drunk, a penitent, a father, and a saint.

"It's especially important to realise John and Yoko moved past this period and they became artists again," says Sean Lennon. "When people ask me, 'What would your dad think of this or that event,' I always say, Whatever he would think now would not be what he thought then. That's all I fucking know."

*One To One: John & Yoko* is in IMAX cinemas on April 9 and 10, and cinemas UK-wide from April 11.

"Dad's amazing at that show. Specifically, his voice, it's got grit to it."

SEAN LENNON



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MON 13 BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY HALL  
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SUN 19	MANCHESTER	BRIDGEWATER HALL
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WED 23	CAMBRIDGE	CORN EXCHANGE
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You can call me Al: Alan Sparhawk gets intense at the Lodge Room, Los Angeles, January 21, 2025.





# AFTER THE FIRE

When Low's Mimi Parker passed in 2022, ALAN SPARHAWK lost his life-partner and his band. Rebuilding has involved a brave left-turn into electronica and a hometown indie-folk team-up that's birthed a stirring new album. What hasn't changed is his compulsion to embrace intensity and soul-scouring candour.

"All I can do is trust the music," he tells BOB MEHR.

Photograph by ARTURO SOLORIO

OUTSIDE THE LODGE ROOM, THE ATMOSPHERE is heavy: the smell of smoke lingers in the air and there's ash on the ground. It's late January in Los Angeles' Highland Park neighbourhood, and for the last two weeks, much of the region has been engulfed by flames from a series of fires. One of the two largest blazes, the Eaton Fire, is centred just a few miles from the old Masonic temple where Alan Sparhawk is performing on this night.

It will be a couple more weeks before the fires are fully contained, but the residents of the area are already looking to the future, trying to find a way forward amid the devastation. It's a feeling Sparhawk knows well.

For nearly 30 years, Sparhawk and his wife, drummer/vocalist Mimi Parker – along with a rotating cast of bassists – led the beloved indie rock band Low. Over the course of 13 albums the Duluth, Minnesota minimalists were carried by transcendent songs and the twined voices of Sparhawk and Parker. Even as Sparhawk occasionally struggled – with mental breakdowns and drug issues – Parker held things together and the band persevered, as its music and career blossomed.

"We were lucky, we had an ideal trajectory," says Sparhawk of the group. "We were hustling the whole time but made just enough to continue doing it. We got to evolve, honed in on a creative freedom that was still anchored in the way we sang and the way we wrote. That gave us confidence and we just kept growing. We were playing our biggest shows at the very end."

That end came in November of 2022, when Parker lost her two-year battle with ovarian cancer, leaving behind Sparhawk and their children, Hollis and Cyrus. The outpouring that followed Parker's passing – from friends, fans and fellow musicians – sustained Sparhawk as he dealt with his grief over the loss of his "Mim".

"I've had thousands of affirmations from people acknowledging their love for Mim, for the band, for what we did ➤



Keeping a Low profile: (left) Alan Sparhawk with his wife Mimi Parker, Duluth, 2021; (right) Sparhawk in September 2024: "I am always eager to jump off the cliff and see where I land."



◀ and what we meant to them," says Sparhawk. "As overwhelming as it would be to try to fully comprehend that, it's incredibly beautiful. At the same time, there's no way you can hold it or claim it because it was the music... it was something that went through us, through Mim and me. It was an honour to be a conduit."

As the thought lingers, Sparhawk sighs softly: "Like I say, I was really lucky."

IT'S EARLY EVENING, A COUPLE OF HOURS BEFORE showtime, and with soundcheck complete, Sparhawk is laid out on a leather couch backstage at the Lodge Room. At 56, he's remarkably fit, a sinewy figure with long blond curls in a pink hooded sweatshirt and brown overalls. He's just a few dates into a West Coast tour — backed by his son Cyrus on bass and frequent collaborator Eric Pollard on drums — in support of his first post-Low project, a solo album called *White Roses, My God*, released last fall.

Rather than the sombre meditation that might have been expected, Sparhawk instead delivered a strange, beguiling collection of electro-pop songs that turned his rich baritone into an unrecognisable, pitch-shifted mutation.

"After losing Mim, there was a moment where I wondered, *What is my voice?*," says Sparhawk, playing with the beads of his necklace. "There was a struggle to sing and feel right. When you sing, it goes from your upper conscious all the way deep down into your core. The difference was not having Mim there any more. There was something about hearing a different sound coming out of me that might

have been exciting, or at least hopeful."

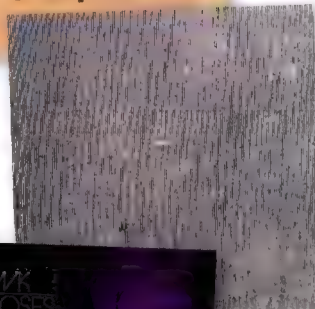
In summer of 2023, Sparhawk began working on a brace of electronic tracks, using a drum machine, synths and HeliCon Voice Tone pedal.

"I was kind of messing around, just experimenting with some tools I had," he says. "The songs were different enough that I could step into them without connotation, but also simple and familiar enough that I could still recognise things coming out of me that were valid."

Given Sparhawk's affection for Neil Young (see sidebar over page) it's tempting to draw parallels to Young's 1983 album *Trans*, where he similarly altered his voice and engaged in outré sonic experiments, inspired by his cerebral palsy-stricken son Ben's use of computers to communicate.

Instead, Sparhawk points to the work of US hyperpop duo 100 Gecs as a clearer touchstone for *White Roses*. "I realised what I was doing was similar to the perversity of what 100 Gecs do," he says. "The first time I heard them a few years back I had a really adverse reaction to it. I remember being like, *What the hell are these kids doing nowadays?*"

"But that's usually a pretty good sign that something's probably pretty forward-thinking and really good. I





remember coming back around to their music and feeling like, Wait a minute — OK, I see what's going on here."

Sparhawk felt the same as he evolved the *White Roses* material — with the help of producer Nat Harvie — and decided to move ahead with the decidedly challenging project as a solo release: "When you're in a studio and something happens that makes the hair on the back of your neck stand up, you have to respect that."

At the Lodge Room, Sparhawk kicks off the show with *White Roses* opener Get Still, and he spends the next 30 minutes performing the bulk of the album, a barrage of skittering beats and melodic drones. "The electronic stuff's pretty exciting to do live," he says. "It's definitely put me into new territory."

It's new territory in terms of his physical performance, too. Live, Sparhawk begins each song by triggering samples, then grabs the microphone and stalks the stage like a hip-hop MC, whipping his hoodie off and waving it in the air, as his processed voice vaults upwards toward the venue's gilt ceiling.

"Being on the mike without an instrument is different," he says. "All the years I was on-stage, I was playing an instrument and sometimes singing. But now I have a deeper understanding of what it means to be singing *completely*. You have nothing to hide behind. The vulnerability of that demands that you either jump off the cliff or not. I'm always eager to jump off the cliff and see where I land."

If some critics were vexed — albeit understanding in their reviews, given the circumstances — by *White Roses*, *My God*, the audience at the Lodge seems genuinely enthusiastic. They lap up the mesmeric grooves, cheering loudly as each song ends.

"Most people that come to the show have probably heard the new material and know I'm going to do that stuff — so it's not quite as much of a shock as sometimes I wish it was," Sparhawk says, chuckling. "In terms of the audience, there's a loyalty to Low and they want to show appreciation to the band and to me, so they're pretty forgiving. For the time being, I'm kind of getting away with it."

SETTING ASIDE THE *WHITE ROSES* MATERIAL, Sparhawk straps on his guitar and begins to lock in with Cyrus and Pollard, as they play through a selection of odds and ends from his discography, including tracks by his Retribution Gospel Choir — a noisier alt-rock side-project active between 2008 and 2013 — and several tunes from his forthcoming album, an organic-sounding collaboration with Minnesota folk-bluegrass combo Trampled By Turtles that a number of Low fans will greet with sighs of relief.

The relationship between Sparhawk and the band goes back some 20 years. "He's been a good friend for a long time, and somewhat of a mentor too," says Trampled By Turtles founder Dave Simonett. "Growing up in Duluth, Alan was this indie rock hero. And Low was like this mystical thing to us."

Early in Trampled By Turtles' career, the rag-tag combo were struggling on the road, when Low tapped them to open a pair of California dates at the last minute. "Al just invited us to hop on the bill without telling anybody, as we found out later," laughs Simonett. "We were a real hippy bluegrass band at that point, playing to this cool indie crowd. I think it was just weird enough that it actually worked."

"It was a moment of generosity from Al. He's just like, 'Well, you're from Duluth. Let me get you on-stage. It doesn't matter what you sound like.' I realised one of the reasons Al's so cool is be-

cause he just doesn't give a shit what anybody thinks. He does what he wants to do. He's fearless in that way."

In late 2022, just a few weeks after Parker's passing, Sparhawk made his return to the stage, performing an epic, cathartic version of Low's When I Go Deaf with Trampled By Turtles at a gig in Minneapolis. Then, in the summer of 2023, the band invited a struggling Sparhawk to join them on the road, mostly to hang out. "Everything was so crazy at that time for him, I can't even imagine how crazy," recalled Simonett. "We just said, Hey man, you want to get out of town for a bit? We had an extra bunk on the bus and he came out on tour. It's like, No pressure, but if you want to play some songs with us, that'd be great."

At the time, Trampled By Turtles were serving as the opening act on the country-roots Outlaw Music Festival Tour, headlined by Willie Nelson. "It was somewhat far away from Low's general demographic," says Simonett. "But Al would come out each night and do

[Low's] Days Like These with us, and it would totally knock people out. He'd just leave the audience in a hushed silence."

Last fall, the Turtles asked Sparhawk to come to Pachyderm Studios, a few hours south of Duluth, to cut a track together, part of a series of recordings they'd been making with various musical pals. Just before the session, Simonett got an e-mail from Sparhawk with a handful of new demo recordings. "I asked him, While we're there, do you think

you could try maybe three or four songs?" recalls Sparhawk. "Maybe it'll turn into something."

The quick two-day session would evolve into a nine-track Sparhawk album that Sub Pop will release on May 30, titled simply, *With Trampled By Turtles*. "The diversion for me in this project is that it's going so back to real instrumentation," says Sparhawk. "It's very much just us standing around in a circle playing. In some ways it's sort of what I've always been doing live, but it's primarily an acoustic record — acoustic guitar, acoustic bass, mandolin, banjo, violin."

As Simonett notes, "there was no rehearsal or pre-production. The first time we played these songs together was in the studio. It was flying by the seat of your pants, which is how we normally record anyway. At the time, none of us really knew it was going to be a record, so there was no pressure."

The Sparhawk/Turtles album offers a stark counterpoint, or perhaps a perfect complement, to *White Roses*, *My God*. "It's conjecture on my part, but he made this super electronic album and now he's made this totally live acoustic album," says Simonett. "Maybe those are just parts of the same whole. But that's one of the things that ➤

"After losing Mim, there was a moment where I wondered, *What is my voice?* There was a struggle to sing and feel right."

ALAN SPARHAWK



Low end theory: (from left) Parker, Matt Livingston and Sparhawk jam in the band's home basement studio, Duluth, Minnesota, January 24, 2007.





## DO THE (SIDE) HUSTLE!

THREE ECLECTIC TEAM-UPS  
KEEPING ALAN SPARHAWK BUSY.

### ...WITH TRAMPLED BY TURTLES

There's talk of the latest Sparhawk incarnation hitting the road for a series of summer festival dates, or potentially a full-scale tour. "I'm not sure what that'll look like yet," says Sparhawk. "It could be me opening for those guys and them joining me for part of the set. Or me playing with them and then they'd take over the show. We're still figuring it out, but we're hoping to make it happen."

### DERECHO RHYTHM SECTION

A four-piece combo featuring Sparhawk's son Cyrus, launched in 2021, promising "a Lake Superior groove you can dance to." "Originally, Cyrus wrote a bunch of funk jams, and since then we've done some collaborative stuff too," notes Sparhawk of the project that draws inspiration from the work of Curtis Mayfield, Funkadelic and Roy Ayers. The group has already made several recordings, with singles and remixes available on Bandcamp.

### TIRED EYES

Sparhawk is also a member of this Neil Young covers band. Led by a group of Minnesota music vets—including members of Ol' Yeller, Lazer Bear and Golden Smog—they dig deep into the darker corners of the catalogue. "We tend to play for hours," chuckles Sparhawk.

"It's a real band, it's loud and it's got that slack-y Crazy Horse thing going on, which is a lot of fun." Sparhawk's also been moonlighting in Ween tribute band, Wandering Eye.



Days like these: (from top) Sparhawk (far right) in the studio with Trampled By Turtles' (from left) Eamonn McLain, Tim Saxhaug and Dave Carroll; DERECHO Rhythm Section (from left) Al Church, Sparhawk, Cyrus and Hollis; Tired Eyes (from left) Rich Mattson, Kraig Johnson, Glen Mattson and Sparhawk.

keeps Al relevant and keeps him exciting for me as a fan—you never know what the hell he's going to put out next. There's no rules with him. And that's rare."

Simonett recalls one particularly heavy moment during the session, during the recording of *Screaming Song*—a slow-building musical panic attack—where the power of Sparhawk's performance left the entire band in tears.

"I don't know what was going on inside his mind when he did that, or what he went through when he lost his wife," says Simonett. "But from my point of view, every time I've ever done anything with Al it's always been that intense and beautiful. Everything he does, he's all the way in."

ONE OF THE ENDEARING QUALITIES OF LOW WAS the deep personal connection between Parker and Sparhawk. The couple first met in grade school, eventually wed and developed a career and a family together. "The marriage is basically the band," as Parker told *MOJO* in 2021.

For Sparhawk, music continues to be a blood affair. His 24-year-old daughter Hollis contributed vocals to his last two albums, "and she's a really beautiful songwriter too," notes Sparhawk. In addition to backing him in the studio and on-stage, 20-year-old son Cyrus and Sparhawk play in a dance-funk group together back in Minnesota.

"Every parent hopes that their kids might be interested in the thing they love so they can share that knowledge or that common experience," says Sparhawk. "It's something that can make your language and relationship with each other deeper."

From the start, Parker and Sparhawk pointed their children to music. "We had records playing around the house and we had them take piano lessons and all that," he says. "At a certain point I realised that if I pushed too hard that the kids might resist it. It had to be something they came to on their own."

Not long after that, Cyrus came to his father with a bass in hand. "He said, 'Hey, can you show me a couple songs?' And he started coming to me with things by Curtis Mayfield and Parliament. I'm like, Oh, Jeez, I guess I need to figure these out."

And are the Sparhawk children fans of Low?

"I don't know that they ever came around to saying, 'I really like your music.' My daughter likes music that's sort of *adjacent* to Low," Sparhawk says, laughing. "So I think she might appreciate what we did. But Cyrus is more into R&B and hip-hop."

As he says this, Cyrus pops his head into the dressing room, nods wordlessly, then departs. "He's very much a second child, you know?" says Sparhawk. "The world can be swirling and crashing around him, and he's very chill. He doesn't have the inclination to dominate the air of every room, like I had when I was younger, or probably his sister did when she was younger. He's very anchoring for me. I'm definitely a lot less anxious on tour than I used to be."

Sparhawk and his son plan to spend much of 2025 together on the road, including an upcoming tour of the UK and Europe, where Low achieved its greatest acclaim.

"We had the biggest crowds and best acceptance in the UK. I'm not sure why, though you could point to a few specific things," he says, noting the vocal support of DJ John Peel, as well as Radiohead's Thom Yorke. "Also, there might be a subliminal element too, because Low was very influenced by British bands—Joy Division and The Cure, and even the early minimalist shoegaze stuff."

The UK press were happy to champion Low, "this little band who were kind of underdogs," says Sparhawk. It seemed exotic that they were from a small town in Minnesota's Iron Range, historic home of Bob Dylan, "And the fact that Mim and I were Mormon was unusual too. They thought that was interesting, whereas in the States it'd be like, 'We're not writing anything about a religious band'—which we weren't. In Europe and the UK, that was fascinating, whereas in America it was dismissed."

More than 30 years since Sparhawk started on the road, the economics of indie rock have changed dramatically. At the moment, he's still trying to figure out



Fully charged: (left) Sparhawk on-stage at the Lodge Room, L.A., January 2025 – “The electronic stuff’s pretty exciting to do live”; (right) Sparhawk on-stage with Trampled By Turtles’ Dave Carroll, July 2023.



whether it will be feasible to bring a drummer to Europe for the spring tour.

“I’m in kind of a weird professional echelon where I make a living, but it only makes sense for me to tour if I’m frugal and smart about it,” says Sparhawk. “I don’t make very much money on the road, but it kind of keeps things going, keeps the blood flowing. But I have to hustle in a few different directions to continue to pay the bills and health insurance.”

In a way, Sparhawk is starting over, touring under his own name, and leaving the Low brand behind.

“We played at a place in San Francisco last night that Low used to sell out and it was about half-full, maybe two-thirds full on a Monday, which isn’t bad,” he says. “There could very well have been 20 people there, and then I would have been really nervous about getting paid by the promoter. It’s nice that people are coming out. These days just getting people to show up at gigs is quite a feat. So I’m grateful.”

AT THE LODGE ROOM, THE crowd is both big and attentive. And as the show reaches its climax, Sparhawk finds himself fumbling with his cell phone on-stage. He dedicates one of the new songs, *No More Darkness*, to the recently deceased director David Lynch and reads out a quote from the filmmaker’s book, *Catching The Big Fish*: “Don’t fight the darkness. Don’t even worry about the darkness. Turn on the light and the darkness goes.”

For most of his life, Sparhawk’s religious faith helped him resist

“Al’s so cool because he just doesn’t give a shit what anybody thinks. He does what he wants to do. He’s fearless.”

DAVE SIMONETT



Don’t fear the darkness: Sparhawk looks toward the light, December 2024.

the darkness. “But I have to say that I have had a hard time with that since Mim died,” he says. “Losing someone so real and feeling their presence disappear is very powerful and it puts faith to shame.

“Maybe I am just in shock and unable to feel the subtleties, but I can’t deny the gulf that’s there and how much it surprises me. I am hopeful and I’m very open to being shown how wrong I am, but these are things that nobody can fully know. I’m OK with that. If God is

there, their work and help is coming from and through other people and the kindness they do.”

During an encore, Sparhawk and the band finally play a couple of Low numbers. First is a halting version of *White Horses*, a song that Sparhawk once described as a “surrender to the universe”. Next comes *Days Like These*, and as Sparhawk’s voice soars alone, it’s a moment of remembrance for Parker and an act of communion with the crowd.

“Thank you to everyone who’ve been friends,” Sparhawk tells them. “Thank you, friends and strangers alike.”

Even as he plays his old band’s songs, Sparhawk continues to grapple with his new reality. Recently, he’s been writing again. The material that’s coming out is somehow familiar, perhaps a little more like the music he once made with Parker.

“I’m not sure if there’s a real trajectory yet, I’m still figuring things out. The last couple of records I’ve made, I was trusting the music,” he says. “All I can do is trust the music and follow it wherever it leads me.”

M

Alan Sparhawk With *Trampled By Turtles* is out May 30 on Sub Pop.



# MAKE THE MUSIC PLAY

The exquisite records **DIONNE WARWICK** made with Burt Bacharach and Hal David set a bar for pop sophistication that may never be topped, leaping across boundaries of genre and race in an era of segregation. But when writs followed hits she proved she could go it alone, too. “I had all these voices asking: ‘What’s she going to do now she doesn’t have Burt and Hal?’” she tells **DAVID HUTCHEON**. “I just said, *This* is what I’m gonna do...”

Photograph by **DAVID REDFERN**

**A**PRIL 28, 1963. BACKSTAGE AT PARIS’S OLYMPIA THEATRE, Dionne Warwick was doing her best to remain calm. Waiting to perform at Les Idoles Des Jeunes, she’d met the revue’s local stars Françoise Hardy and Sylvie Vartan and said hello to fellow imports The Shirelles and a 13-year-old Stevie Wonder. After recent months on the chitlin’ circuit in the still-segregated Southern US, her European debut promised a glimpse of another side of life. She took to the stage, however, to applause that quickly gave way to silence. From the cover of Warwick’s latest French release, *This Empty Place* – featuring a barefoot strawberry blonde in a coquettish pose – they were expecting something, or someone rather different.

“There was an audible gasp when I walked on stage,” Warwick recalls. “They didn’t believe I was Dionne Warwick.” Which is why the first words she said on-stage in Europe were, “Yeah, I ain’t no white woman, I’m black.”

The singer, who turned 84 in December, is walking **MOJO** through a career whose milestones include sessions for Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller at the dawn of soul, reshaping the Philadelphia sound with Thom Bell in the 1970s, conquering the planet with Barry Gibb in the 1980s and raising millions for Aids research. Towering musically above even those moments, though, are the hits she made with Burt Bacharach and Hal David – *Walk On By*, *You’ll Never Get To Heaven* (If You Break My Heart) and *Reach Out For Me* in 1964 alone – that brought an inimitable uptown sophistication to pop between 1962 and 1971. The only woman who had more American chart action in the second half of the 20th century was Aretha Franklin – albeit with the help of another song written by Bacharach and David and already released by Warwick: *I Say A Little Prayer*.

It’s a wintry New Jersey lunchtime, not a million miles from the home in which Marie Dionne Warrick – blame a record company admin error for her professional surname – grew up. She was raised in East Orange, a few miles northwest of Newark and within easy reach of New York; her father, Mancel, was a Pullman porter (then butcher, accountant, music executive and road manager); her mum, Lee, worked too, but also sang and managed the family gospel group, The Drinkard Jubilaires, alongside her sister Emily, later known as Cissy Houston and mother of Whitney. ➤

David Redfern/Getty



Here I am: Dionne  
Warwick in Hyde Park,  
London, 1965.







That's what friends (and family) are for: (clockwise from left) Dionne with her father, Mancel; Warwick with Burt Bacharach and Scepter Records president, Florence Greenberg, 1970; Hal David in the '60s: "He wasn't a lyricist," says Warwick, "he was a poet"; Grand designs: Bacharach and Warwick performing for TV, London, 1970; "Ta-da!" Dionne arrives in London, May 5, 1965.



◀ Following suit, in 1957 Lee's daughters Dionne and Delia (AKA Dee Dee) formed the Gospelairens.

"Gospel had always been the musical foundation in our family," says Warwick, "but we listened to 'secular' music, too, and I've never faced any problems for singing both. My parents considered music to be just music, regardless of genre."

As a teenager, Warwick would venture into Harlem and the Apollo Theater, a venue the Drinkard Jubilairens frequently played. Eventually, the Gospelairens – featuring Dionne, Dee Dee, Sylvia Shemwell and future soul star Doris Troy – plucked up the courage to participate in one of its notorious amateur nights. "I'd seen Sandman Sims, the stage manager, drag acts off stage with his hook," she remembers. "So it was terrifying, but we won, and the crowd at the Apollo accepted us. We thought we'd got it made."

**T**HEY WEREN'T FAR WRONG. IN THE APOLLO audience that night was a scout from Herman Lubinsky's Savoy Records, a label based in Newark, who asked the young women if they could add vocals at sessions for saxophonist Sam 'The Man' Taylor – they can be clearly heard on 1961 single Deliver Me – and blues singer Nappy Brown.

"We were just in the right place at the right time," says Warwick, "doing these basic oohs, aahs and yay-yays for Savoy, and a couple of weeks after that, I got a call from Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. One of the musicians at Savoy told them they should use us. Would we be interested in doing a background session with The Drifters?" Warwick smiles at the way things just fell into place. "Well, why not?"

It was at one of those sessions – The Drifters were recording Mexican Divorce – that Warwick first met Burt Bacharach, the song's co-writer and arranger, who was conducting for producers Leiber and Stoller. Bacharach, who had recently paired up with lyricist Hal David, was looking for a voice. "He approached me to

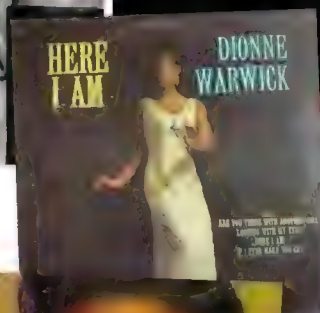
see if I'd be interested in doing demonstration records of the songs he'd write with David," recalls Warwick, "and I said, As long as it doesn't interfere with my education – my mother would kill me, and you, if it does."

By day, Warwick was studying music education at Hartt College in Connecticut; by night, she became "the demo queen" at the Brill Building, the office at 1619 Broadway that was home to a host of young writing teams, her versatility bringing out the best in any song looking for a singer. As the dominance of sheet-music sales and Tin Pan Alley's Great American Songbook faded, the newcomers were wilfully breaking the rules: adding jazzy chord progressions to suburban pop melodies, pairing Neapolitan opera with rhythm

and blues, melding unusual time changes to mambo and calypso, and creating music that teenagers of all colours wanted to buy on disc.

At the heart of it was Florence Greenberg, a middle-aged white housewife who owned the Scepter and Wand labels and was responsible, along with her partner, Luther Dixon, for hits by The Shirelles (Will You Love Me Tomorrow), Chuck Jackson (Any Day Now; I Keep Forgettin') and Tommy Hunt (I Just Don't Know What To Do With Myself). Before the ascendancy of Motown and Stax, before James Brown got his brand new bag, this was one of the breeding grounds for soul. "She was like a mother to us," recalls Warwick. "A mother hen. She really was a loving, giving person and treated us like we were her children, and we enjoyed every minute."

The first time Greenberg noticed Warwick was on a demo of It's Love That Really Counts, which would become a 1962 Shirelles single and later a Merseybeats 45. "Forget the song," she memorably ordered, "get the girl singer." Greenberg offered the girl singer a recording contract, Bacharach and David presented her with a production deal. Having no dreams of becoming a star, Warwick handed the business side over to the one man she could trust: "My







daddy made sure the contract was correct. So I had no problems at all.”

**B**ACHARACH AND DAVID HAD EARMARKED *Make It Easy On Yourself* for Warwick’s first single, but again Greenberg was unimpressed with the song. While Scepter dithered, Calvin Carter of Vee-Jay seized the opportunity to release a version by the former Impression Jerry Butler, which made the Billboard Top 20. Warwick had a bone to pick with the composers.

“They didn’t keep their word and I didn’t like this too much, so I let them know,” says Warwick today. “I was furious and said to them, *Don’t make me over*, meaning, *Don’t make a promise you’re not going to keep*. And Hal David immediately went away and wrote *Don’t Make Me Over*, especially for me. I thought that was wonderful. I had solid evidence that they understood what I was saying, that this was the attitude I had to have.” She laughs at the memory of a young and inexperienced singer being feisty enough to get her way.

Once again, Greenberg detested the song. “We couldn’t understand it,” says Warwick. “She obviously never had a good ear. We said we wanted it to be the single, and she looked at us: ‘No, I hate this.’ She made it the B-side of *I Smiled Yesterday* — the biggest bomb I’ve ever had.” More laughter. “Thank goodness for DJs like Murray The K, they found the B-side and played it.”

Released in October 1962, *Don’t Make Me Over* became not only the accidentally renamed Warwick’s first hit, but the debut Top

40 entry for Bacharach and David as writer-producers.

The song would also serve as a template for the hits that followed. There’s a dissonance between singer and lyrics — despite laying down her ground rules, she’s never in control of the emotions beneath the surface — and it flouted convention. The backing singers do most of the work for the first 40 seconds, building tension. Warwick is a model of detachment until, with less than a minute to go, both she and the orchestra crack; almost immediately, as if playing hard to get, she vanishes, leaving Bacharach’s orchestration to pick up the pieces; but just as you expect the tune to fade away, she returns, wailing the killer line, “Accept me for what I am, accept me for the things I do.”

“Hal David was not a lyricist, he was a poet,” Warwick says today, “and Burt had a very unorthodox way of composing. However he felt that particular day is how he would compose that day. Their compositions are not the easiest songs to sing, but because of my musical training, I had the ability to read music, and that’s what I did. And I think that’s one of the reasons the three of us got along so well, we were a triangular marriage that worked. Every time I went in the studio with Burt, he’d say: ‘OK, let’s see if she can do this.’ And when I did it, he’d say: ‘Oh, OK, let’s see if she can do *this*.’”

Though it took a year to find a song that could build on *Don’t Make Me Over*’s success, once the trio found their method, there was no stopping them. Anyone Who Had A Heart took Warwick into the US Top 10 in 1963, *Walk On By* followed close behind it while also (along with *Reach Out For Me*) topping the R&B charts in 1964. Each one evades simple categorisation: definitely not easy listening; not textbook R&B; secular lyrics with a gospel feel.



**“THERE WAS AN AUDIBLE GASP WHEN I WALKED ON-STAGE. THEY DIDN’T BELIEVE I WAS DIONNE WARWICK.”**  
**DIONNE WARWICK**



**I**N APRIL 1963, WARWICK JOINED THE Sam Cooke Show in Knoxville, Tennessee, for her first tour, on a bill that included Solomon Burke, The Crystals, The Drifters and Jerry Butler, plus Little Richard’s former backing band, The Upsetters. “Oh, they upset me a lot,” she squeals. “Musicianship was not a priority at those shows. They’d tell me they could hear Burt’s changes — not read them from the charts, just hear them. Whatever they were hearing was not what I was singing. But we got through it all. It was an education.”

Warwick had known Cooke since his days with The Soul Stirrers, the most famous of all the “church-wrecking” gospel groups, with whom The Drinkard Jubilairs had toured. And unlike many of his early fans, she had not turned her back when he had become a pop star singing secular music. “He was not a stranger at all, more like a relative,” she smiles. “He was a wonderful young man and an absolute gentleman — and he wouldn’t allow me to come to the parties after the show or allow me to stay out late at night. Give me a break! And, remember, my mommy was on the road with me, too. I was captured.”

The tour was Warwick’s first experience of the segregated South, of water fountains for black people and having the police warn her about speaking out of turn. For Cooke, who would shortly after write *A Change Is Gonna*

Come, the most significant moments of the tour included water cannons being turned on African-American teenagers in Birmingham, Alabama, and intimidating police dogs patrolling the aisles of divided auditoriums. Undaunted, Warwick adapted the lyrics to showstopper *What’d I Say* for the occasion: “Tell your mama, tell your ➤



“paw, we’re gonna integrate Arkansas.”

Staying on the road, she subsequently toured the US again with Jackie Wilson – “He spoiled me rotten” – and made her European debut. In May 1964 she found herself on *Ready, Steady, Go!*, her British TV debut. It was then she discovered that *Anyone Who Had A Heart* had been a huge UK success for Cilla Black, while her original had stalled in the lower reaches of the Top 40. “I felt like I was still recording demonstration records for other singers. I hadn’t a clue why they wanted to jump on my songs. Dusty Springfield did a credible job, but it was not only Dusty, it was Marianne Faithfull, it was, oh, my goodness, the other girl’s name... Sandie Shaw. You have some great writers, but we had so much great material, and it benefited Bacharach and David more than me.”

Perhaps it was this discovery that made her take a closer interest in the business side of her career. By the late 1960s, Warwick had become part of the mainstream pop industry – *Do You Know The Way To San Jose* won a Grammy in 1969; lifted from Bacharach and David’s Broadway musical *Promises, Promises*, *I’ll Never Fall In Love Again* did the same two years later – yet all was not well. Warwick had Scepter’s accounts audited and announced she was leaving the label in 1971; after Bacharach and David scrutinised the books, Scepter collapsed.

The trio’s next stop couldn’t have been bigger.

“Mo Ostin called me personally and said, ‘Warner Brothers wants the three of you, please consider us.’” Wooed by a label renowned for valuing artists’ talent, Bacharach, David and Warwick

signed on as a team. Their next album, *Dionne*, released in 1972, wasn’t a great success, however, with Bacharach and David preoccupied by their soundtrack to the doomed movie *Lost Horizon*. The pair fell out. Worse, it brought them into conflict with Warners, Ostin and Warwick.

“*Lost Horizon*?” There’s already a measure of distaste in Warwick’s voice. “That was something that should have been lost long before they thought about writing for it. They decided to split in the middle of our contract. Mo said they had to write my albums for me, so I would have to bring them back together, or he would sue me. Well, reuniting them was impossible, so I had to sue Bacharach and David for breach of contract or Warners would take me to court.”

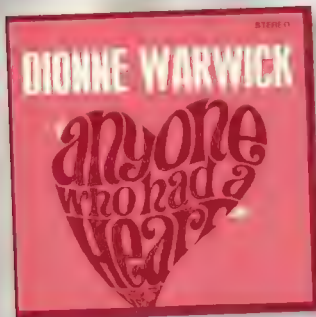
Heartbreaking?

“Yeah, but I had no choice. I was not going to be sued by a company as big as Warners, nor did I deserve to be. That was the end of our relationship for 12 years... but I stayed friends with all Burt’s wives, right down to Jane, the last one. They all loved me.”

PERHAPS UNSURPRISINGLY, WARNERS APPEARED reluctant to promote the four albums Warwick released without her former collaborators. “I had all these voices asking: ‘What’s she going to do now she doesn’t have Bacharach and David?’ I just said, *This* is what I’m gonna do, and I teamed up with Thom Bell and The Spinners to record

## WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW

### 10 undeniably great Dionne Warwick recordings, by David Hutecheon



#### ANYONE WHO HAD A HEART

WRITERS: BACHARACH/DAVID

(Scepter single, 1963)

A peerless heartbreaker, with vocalist and orchestra at loggerheads, the former trying to convince the latter this affair has a future, the musicians too wise to be deluded. Even Bacharach struggled to explain the shifting time signatures. No imitations come close.

#### MAKE THE NIGHT A LITTLE LONGER

WRITERS: GOFFIN/KING

(from *Make Way For Dionne Warwick*, Scepter, 1964)



With nine future Bacharach/David standards – including *Walk On By* – Warwick’s third LP is among the Brill

Building’s greatest calling cards, but it’s this cut of a song already essayed by The Shirelles and Chuck Jackson that closes the album, Warwick’s vibrato making every line her own.

#### I SAY A LITTLE PRAYER

WRITERS: BACHARACH/DAVID

(Scepter single, 1967)

The cute backing vocals, the Tijuana Brass trumpet (which Warwick brilliantly mimics on the break as if mocking its ubiquity), the barroom piano fills, the hairpin tempo change for the chorus, Warwick’s ice-cool vocals: anti-war protest songs just don’t come more subversive.

#### DO YOU KNOW THE WAY TO SAN JOSE

WRITERS: BACHARACH/DAVID

(Scepter single, 1968)

Warwick was sceptical, thinking David had let his standards slip. Result: a 3 million-seller and a Grammy. Was it the ship’s whistle, the drunken organ or the close-miked bass drum that swung public opinion? No matter, she still doesn’t like it.



#### A HARD DAY’S NIGHT

WRITERS: LENNON/MCCARTNEY

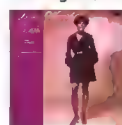
(from *Soulful*, Scepter, 1969)

Warwick was outgrowing her Broadway-based mentors and co-produced her 12th LP with Chips Moman in Memphis. One of three Beatles tracks on the first album with zero Bacharach-David input, Lennon’s pell-mell rocker is here transformed into an Aretha-worthy slow blues.

#### DIDN'T WE

WRITER: WEBB

(from *I’ll Never Fall In Love Again*, Scepter, 1970)



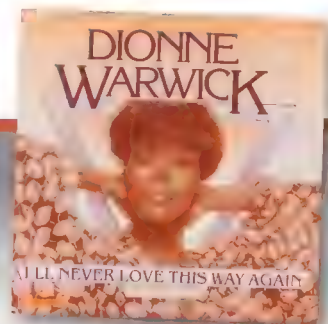
Warwick sings Jimmy Webb, Bacharach arranges. It’s a vocal tour de force – a passionate leap on from even two years earlier – but she was moving faster than Burt and Hal now, their success with *Promises, Promises* on Broadway having distracted them.

#### IF WE ONLY HAVE LOVE

WRITERS: SHUMAN/BREL/BLAU

(from *Dionne*, Warner Bros, 1972)

All smiles on the back cover, but Hal and Burt were otherwise occupied, and the first Warners album by the renamed Warwick (on her astrologer’s advice) misses them. Yet this Bassey-esque belter makes



you wish a Dionne Sings Jacques Brel LP had materialised.

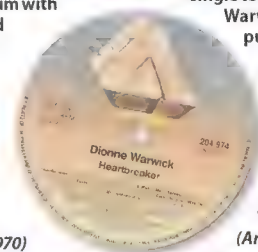
#### I’LL NEVER LOVE THIS WAY AGAIN

WRITERS: KERR/JENNINGS

(Arista single, 1979)

A masterstroke by Arista’s Clive Davis. Barry Manilow had to audition to be her producer, but their first single together kicks off

Warwick’s third act and puts her back in the Top 10. An arrangement that must have impressed even Bacharach.



#### HEARTBREAKER

WRITERS:

GIBB/GIBB/GIBB

(Arista single, 1982)

With the Bee Gees on one of their fallow periods, the Gibb brothers wrote the biggest hit of Warwick’s third decade: a worldwide Number 1 single that heralded a 3 million-selling album. The album stands up remarkably well, too – it’s all about the songs.

#### THAT’S WHAT FRIENDS ARE FOR

WRITERS: BACHARACH/BAYER SAGER

(Warner Bros single, 1985)

Burt (co-writing with then-wife Carole) is back, Warwick takes a song already recorded by The Stylistics, and enlists Gladys Knight, Elton John and Stevie Wonder – Dionne still calls him Stevland – to raise money for Elizabeth Taylor’s Aids foundation. The biggest-selling single of 1986.





**Affairs of the heart:** (clockwise from above left) Warwick with Cissy and Whitney Houston; recording with Bacharach, Pye Studios, London, November 29, 1964; ciggy break with Cilla Black, 1964; (below) Dionne today: "the songs kept me alive."



Then Came You."

Warwick's first Billboard Number 1 was released in 1974, but on The Spinners' label, Atlantic — Warners wouldn't release Warwick's album of the same name until nine months later. It limped to Number 167 in the charts.

Despondent, Warwick considered giving up singing and becoming a music teacher when her Warners contract ended. She was saved by Clive Davis at Arista. "He just said, 'There's no reason you're not recording.' I said I'd think about it, then I asked God what I should do. I had found some great songs, and Clive had the idea of getting Barry Manilow to produce me. I liked working with people I'd never worked with before, so..." There's a satisfied pause, as Warwick thinks back to 1979-80. "We won two Grammys that year [best pop vocal performance for I'll Never Love This Way Again; best R&B vocal performance for Déjà Vu] and *Dionne* was my first platinum album."

Greater success was to follow in 1982, when Davis paired her with Barry, Robin and Maurice Gibb for the album *Heartbreaker*, which sold 3 million copies worldwide on the back of a title track that passed 4 million as a single. "It makes me feel good to know people appreciate me," she says. "That's the attitude I've had towards everybody I've worked with since Bacharach and David."

While Warwick's stock had arguably never been higher, Bacharach had found it harder to keep his finger on the pulse of contemporary music. In 1984, TV producer Aaron Spelling commissioned him to write the theme song for TV drama series *Finder Of Lost Loves*, but had specific terms.

"Aaron said, 'Nobody's gonna sing this song but Dionne, so work it out,'" says Warwick. "Burt called me, he said, 'Hello, Dionne.' Who is this? 'Burt.' I said: Burt who? I did... well, it could have been Burt Reynolds!"

Bacharach was summoned to an audience at which he apologised for the way their alliance had been dissolved. "Right there

## "BACHARACH CALLED ME. WHO IS THIS? 'BURT.' I SAID: BURT WHO? WELL, IT COULD HAVE BEEN BURT REYNOLDS!"

DIONNE WARWICK



he said it was the biggest mistake he ever made," says Warwick.

Bridges repaired, Bacharach was also on board for *That's What Friends Are For*, a charity single recorded with pals Gladys Knight and Stevie Wonder, plus Elton John, whom she'd met in a supermarket the day before the recording session. The biggest-selling single of 1986, it was Warwick's last chart-topper.

There have been gospel and Christmas releases since, but the final album of her Arista contract was a 1994 collection of Brazilian pop and samba songs, sung in Portuguese.

Although Warwick appears content to have spent much of the past 30 years taking life as it comes — occasionally popping up on TV shows such as *The Masked Singer* or *Celebrity Apprentice*, and being one of social media's more universally admired contributors — her name has occasionally appeared in news headlines. There was a 2002 arrest for possession of marijuana (all charges were dropped), and bankruptcy in 2013, and she is today reluctant to discuss the death of Whitney Houston. When the American journalist Dan Rather asked her if she thought her cousin paid a price for her fame, she tellingly replied: "No, I'd say it was the price of the choices she made."

Diplomatically, Warwick won't conclude by nominating a favourite song by her most famous partners but promises to sing plenty of them on her spring tour, which coincides with *Songs Of Inspiration*, her first album in more than five years.

"Being able to find great songs had a lot to do with my success," she says, "and I have always been completely involved with that. But when I didn't have Burt and Hal, I was inundated with songs. That's something I'm so very grateful for. It's always about great songs. They kept me alive." **M**

Dionne Warwick's live show — *Don't Make Me Over: In Person And In Her Own Words* — tours the UK in April and May.



# THE POGUES UNLEASH RUM SODOMY & THE LASH

Out of the saloon bars of early-'80s north London came an unholy union of Irish rebel music and punk, fronted by hard-drinking poet-bard Shane MacGowan. In 1985, **The Pogues** recorded their masterpiece of romanticism, defiance and defeat with Elvis Costello at the controls. "It was suddenly like the songs sounded huge and full," recall the principals. "You'd have to say it was awe-inspiring."

Interviews: **ANDREW PERRY** • Photograph by **ANDREW CATLIN**

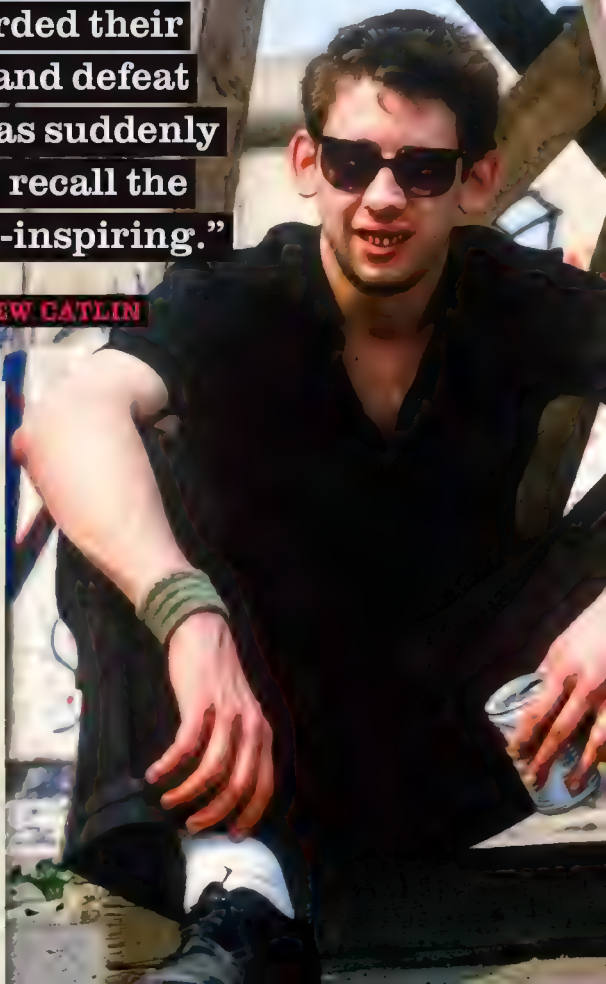


**Shane MacGowan:** The energy of punk rock was already in Irish music. When I was a kid, I saw The Dubliners, The Clancy Brothers – it was all around. The idea for The Pogues was just adding a bass guitar, and a very loud drummer stood up in the middle – Moe Tucker-style, except he was (*clenches fists*). And Spider's drinks tray as well, a traditional Irish instrument – like the bones or the spoons [live, Spider Stacy was wont to hit himself over the head with a drinks tray].

**Spider Stacy:** I first met Shane when he was in The Nipple Erectors. You could hear that this guy was a really great tunesmith, and the lyrics were always smart and slightly psychotic. In early '81, Shane,

myself and members of my old band The Millwall Chainsaws played down at [Richard Strange's] Cabaret Futura as The New Republicans, doing Irish rebel songs, and that was the springboard for The Pogues. Shane had wide reading, empathy, and a keen and observant eye – but the way he plunged into that whole Behan-esque, Joycean literary tradition, you'd have to say it was awe-inspiring.

**Jem Finer:** There was this period where it was just me and Shane practising and going busking. When he started teaching me what would become Pogues ➤





Up against the wall:  
The Pogues in Berlin,  
April 20, 1985 (from top)  
Cait O'Riordan, Andrew  
Ranken, Philip Chevron,  
James Fearnley, Spider  
Stacy, Shane MacGowan.







**“WE KNOCKED HEADS A FEW TIMES. SHANE WAS A FEISTY FUCKER.”**  
**JAMES FEARNLEY**

◀ songs, I was quite blown away. It felt so familiar and old already, but also so totally of that moment.

**Dave Robinson:** I went to see them early on: they did two songs and dived into the audience, and only the drummer [Andrew Ranken] was left. I went into the public bar next door and they were all in there having a pint, so I thought, These are my people. Their first manager, Stan Brennan, had produced [1984's debut] *Red Roses For Me*, so we signed that and it sold about 4,000 copies over a few months.

They were always so smashed out of their minds, it was very hard to get things going. They had a small punky crowd. The Irish didn't like them, because they were, a) English, and b) too drunk even for Irish people, so we got them a tour with Elvis Costello [circa *Goodbye Cruel World*], and after that they were starting to get wild audience participation.

**SS:** The drinking thing got rather overplayed. It was a recurrent motif, if you like, but we didn't drink any more than any other band. I mean, Jesus, have you ever met an orchestra?

**Jem F:** Shane's writing was becoming more expansive. A Pair Of Brown Eyes had actually been around since Shane and I were busking, as this song called Me And Hanley, about the Falklands Islands – an anti-Thatcher, anti-war song. The Old Main Drag was also one of the first songs we did, but songs would change form, or split apart, and one part would meet up with a bit of another song, in this long gestation. Sally MacLennane, on the other hand, just arrived fully formed. Shane would just come in and go, “Here's a song.” Kind of mind-blowing.

**SM:** I was reading a lot of history books. People used to know their own history, and my grandparents on both sides had fucking done

their part in what is known as the Irish revolution. So, what? I've got to become a moron because I play in bands?

**James Fearnley:** For the Costello tour, our sound man Darryl Hunt made this mixtape of Irish traditional, and elements from those songs found their way into the second slew of material, like I lifted an accordion part from Dermot O'Brien's Connemara Rose for A Pair Of Brown Eyes, and we all thought it was really funny.

**SS:** There's been a perception in some quarters that The Pogues were a one-man-band. That was really not the case at all. James Fearnley has never had the credit he deserves for arranging the songs. You often had to coax songs out of Shane, and usually it was a cooperative effort.

**James F:** There were many times where it ended up with Jem, Shane and I in a rehearsal room, getting to the bottom of what Shane was trying to do, while everybody else went to the pub. We knocked heads a few times. Shane was a feisty fucker, I maybe saw more of his feisty side than the vulnerable, gentle side. But I was gobsmacked to find that he'd written Sally MacLennane. I was ready to believe it was a traditional, just because of the subject matter of the pub and saying goodbye to somebody, and the way that it sounded.

**Jem F:** For the Irish tunes we actually covered, Shane and I had these little books called *Traditional Songs Popular In Ireland*. Stuff like Eric Bogle's *And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda* was in there, as was Ewan MacColl's *Dirty Old Town*, which we already knew from The Dubliners.

**DR:** After the Costello tour I'd put the feelers out, Would Elvis produce them? He'd left Stiff and his manager, Jake Riviera, my ex-partner, had him signed to his new label, F-Beat, so it was a delicate negotiation. As luck would have it,

Elvis had the hots for Cait [O'Riordan, bassist], so he decided he would do it.

**Elvis Costello:** I saw my task as to capture them in their dilapidated glory before a more professional producer fucked them up by taking away that raw thing they had on-stage.

**James F:** I was intimidated on the first day when he came down the stairs into the basement at Elephant Studios in Metropolitan Wharf, Wapping. There was Elvis with his pork-pie hat on, peeling a pomelo – a fruit that actually rhymes with his name. By now, he was already living with Cait in Holland Park – hence the exotic fruit. It was a bit like, “Oh, we're West End people now, and you're still north Londoners.”

**Jem F:** Elvis was a massive step up from Stan. You felt you were in the hands of someone who knew what they were doing. It was suddenly like the songs sounded huge and full, reaching a potential.

**Dick Cuthell:** I'd encountered Costello on [1979 EC production] *The Specials*. I'd actually worked with The Dubliners and The Clancy Brothers when I was the engineer at Island's studio in Chiswick, which [The Pogues] liked. They asked me to put a horn arrangement on *And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda*. So many bands after punk didn't have decorum, but I found The Pogues very focused. After one listen you couldn't help ‘getting’ this song, so I made up a brass section which was meant to evoke a rather sombre military band. I later found out that a distant relation of mine, Algernon Hubert Cuthell, was killed at Gallipoli, where the song character loses his legs.

**James F:** We had our misunderstandings with Costello over who was in the band, and who was producing. That was partly my problem. Elvis did the slide on Jesse James, and I got cross, because



Naval gazing: (this page, clockwise from left) MacGowan at rest; Chevron, Fearnley and MacGowan on board the *Rum Sodomy & The Lash* LP launch, London, 1985; (from left) Ranken, MacGowan, Fearnley, Stacy, Jem Finer and O'Riordan, 1984; (opposite) The Pogues perform on *The Tube*, 1985.







## DRAMATIS PERSONAE



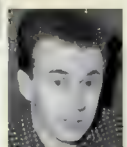
● Shane MacGowan (vocals)



● Peter 'Spider' Stacy (tin whistle, vocals)



● James Fearnley (accordion)



● Jem Finer (banjo)



● Dave Robinson (Stiff Records co-founder)



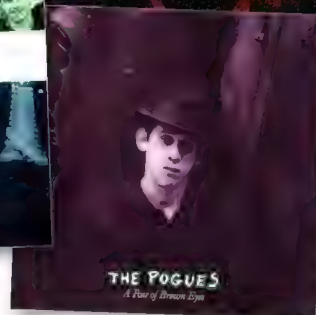
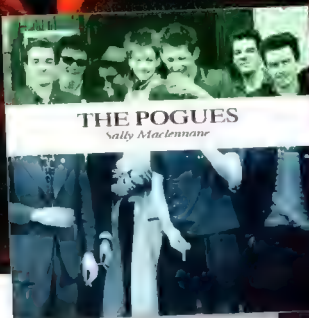
● Elvis Costello (producer)



● Dick Cuthell (horns)



● Peter Mennim (front cover artist)



I thought he should be behind the desk.

**EC:** I know Shane didn't like me at all... I wasn't a punk, as far as he was concerned. I think he thought I was a dilettante. The music I'd made immediately before that wasn't my strongest game, so there was every reason.

**James F:** There was this Ovation guitar Costello brought in, which Shane thought was bewitched or something. He projected whatever inner conflict he had about working with Elvis onto it. Here was a songwriter's songwriter with a certain amount of power, who was going out with Cait, when Shane and Cait had had a relationship, and with Shane being a lightning conductor for emotions that he wouldn't know what to do with apart from make them into a song or drink himself stupid... so, he gave the guitar a kick and it went flying across the room, and we had to make sure that Elvis didn't know.

**SS:** The album title was [drummer] Andrew Ranken's idea: he'd read that Winston Churchill was having an argument with some admiral, and Churchill said to him, "Oh don't talk to me about the traditions of the Royal Navy, they're just rum, sodomy and the lash!" Perfect!

**James F:** Thematically, it's a combative record. A lot of it is to do with war, weaponry and soldiers. Billy's Bones is all about a soldier, The Gentleman Soldier, And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda too. A Pair Of Brown Eyes is all about military service and how people don't understand it now, and The Wild Cats Of

Kilkenny is about a fight.

**Jem F:** I was talking to my wife Marcia Farquhar, who's an artist and an art historian, and she suggested the Géricault painting *The Raft Of The Medusa*, for the sleeve – not only because it fits with the nautical theme, but also because it was a protest against this shipwreck where the underclasses had been left abandoned on a raft, while the top brass got the lifeboats. That very much resonated with the worldview of The Pogues.

Marcia's also a prolific collagist, and when Stan and his partner had their first son, Marcia made a collage for them with babies cut out from a Mothercare catalogue, and our heads stuck on them. We decided to do the same on *The Raft Of The Medusa*.

**Peter Mennim:** The band had had this idea, so I took photos of each of them in their studio – in Camden, I think. I asked them which character they would like to be in the original Géricault, and shot them accordingly. Then I had a large print-out of the painting made, and painted them straight onto that.

**SS:** We had one of the best launch events ever on HMS Belfast. We sailed across the Thames on a longboat in 19th-century naval costumes and played the album. Later on, a Melody Maker journalist was thrown overboard by a Sounds journalist – a good party!

**DR:** The album charted [in August '85], then went straight out again. Slowly, we got up towards 30,000 here, and 100,000 in France – the French love a genuine alcoholic. When we really got The Pogues going, was when we did *The Irish Rover* with The Dubliners [in '87]. Before that, The Pogues were seen as 'plastic paddies', but that track turned the Irish audience onto them.

**EC:** I quit production as a full-time occupation after The Pogues. When all's said and done, *The Sick Bed Of Cúchulainn*, *Sally MacLennane*, *A Pair Of Brown Eyes* – those are the truly great songs MacGowan wrote.

**SS:** By the early '90s, Shane's writing had dried up. Certainly, there was a lot of burn-out. It just became a slog. I wouldn't presume to speak for Shane, but I think he just lost interest.

**James F:** Forty years later, *RS&TL* won't stay in its box. It wants to get out, which is why we're playing it again.

**Jem F:** It's taken on a whole life of its own, and we've got guests appearing like Lisa O'Neill and guys from Lankum. It feels like how tradition is supposed to work: you take something from the past, then you rework and reconfigure it, and pass it on again. So playing these songs with this new generation who were inspired by us, it feels like a circle completing itself. **M**

*The Pogues present A Celebration Of 40 Years Of Rum Sodomy & The Lash live in the UK in May. Shane MacGowan interviewed in 2012. Elvis Costello quoted from Stereogum and Virgin Media Television, both 2022. See Peter Mennim's other work at [www.petermennim.com](http://www.petermennim.com).*



# **SHEER ART ATTACK!**





Four songwriters with four eccentric visions, alchemising hard rock, prog, funk, glam and disco into chart gold, **QUEEN** lay claim to being the oddest biggest band in history. Fifty years since their *Bohemian Rhapsody* apotheosis, **BRIAN MAY** and **ROGER TAYLOR** explore the songs that fuelled their unique story, and the method in their mod free-for-all: "It's a journey of self-belief!"

## PLUS!

**FREDDIE MERCURY** The art school years!

**UNDER PRESSURE** Inside their face-off with Bowie!

**LIVE AID** Queen come back from the dead!

Velvet crush: Queen in 1976 (from left) Freddie Mercury, Brian May, Roger Taylor, John Deacon

Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy Stock Photo



# "MY SONGS ARE ALWAYS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS"

Art or science? **BRIAN MAY** has brought both, and more, to the music of **QUEEN**. But the band's swagger disguised a writer with unusual influences (*West Side Story*?) and more than a little insecurity. "You can reveal too much," he tells **MARK BLAKE**.

Portrait by **MICK ROCK**.

**E**VEN TODAY, OBSERVATORIO DEL Teide's towers – shining brilliant white against the Tenerifian sky – resemble a Giorgio de Chirico painting brought to life. It was here that 22-year-old Brian May spent spring 1970 with professors and fellow students from Imperial College, Kensington. Together the island's clear skies and the observatory's telescopes allowed an unhindered view of the zodiacal dust Brian was studying for his PhD thesis.

Back in London, May played guitar in Smile, a trio who'd shared a bill with Pink Floyd and Free but were struggling to make any serious headway. May bought a Spanish guitar in Tenerife, hoping to experience a musical big bang moment when he wasn't pondering the cosmos.

One night, perched on the volcanic rocks of Mount Teide, May watched the sun rise over the Atlantic while picking out a riff and singing the first words that came into his head. "They were 'tie your mother down'," he recalls. "But I thought, Oh God, I can't use that title."

A couple of months later, May returned home and Smile fell apart. Their friend, Farrokh 'Freddie' Bulsara (soon to become Freddie Mercury) volunteered his services, and a new group, Queen, emerged, precocious and preening, from the ashes.

Six years later, Queen were still basking in the glory of their breakthrough hit, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, and its parent album, *A Night At The Opera*, when May revisited the riff from

Tenerife. "I said to Freddie, I'm thinking about this as a song, but the only title I have is 'Tie Your Mother Down', which obviously doesn't work..." he says.

Mercury looked at him quizzically. "Why on earth not?" he demanded. "Of course it works, Brian. Why wouldn't you use it?"

Tie Your Mother Down became the opening song on Queen's fifth album, *A Day At The Races*, a Top 40 single and a rallying cry performed at every one of the band's shows between 1976 and 1986 and many more this century.


This story is one of many anecdotes illustrating Queen's singular chemistry and songwriting firepower. Like The Beatles, all four of Queen – May, Mercury, drummer Roger Taylor and bass guitarist John Deacon – composed hits: May's The Show Must Go On, Mercury's Killer Queen, Taylor's These Are The Days Of Our Lives, Deacon's Another One Bites The Dust...

Queen were four wildly divergent songwriters, who'd sometimes fight over a single note, but still nurtured each other's talents, and presented a united front against critics suspicious of a group alchemising hard rock, synth-pop and even disco into commercial gold.

Queen's most famous song, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, turns 50 in October. Before then, though, Brian May is examining the art and science of songwriting and the many highs and occasional lows of his and Queen's compositional journey.

Bright-eyed and bushy haired (but of course), the 77-year-old joins MOJO from his house: all wooden beams, muted colour schemes and panoramic windows, and a long way, physically and spiritually, from Mount Teide in spring 1970... ➤

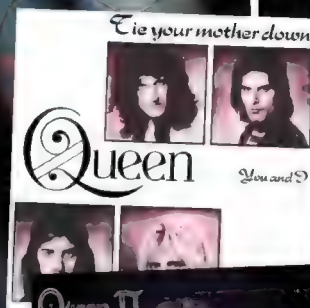
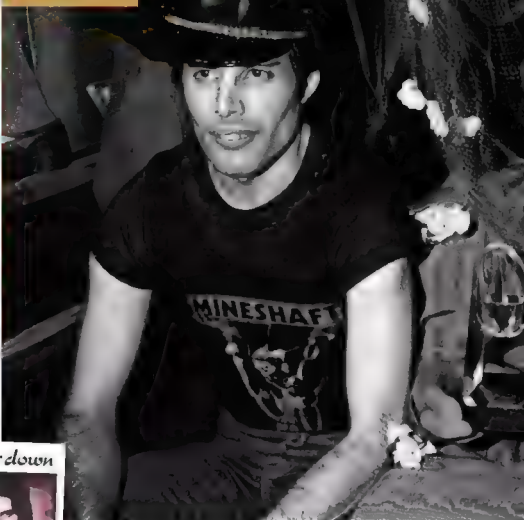
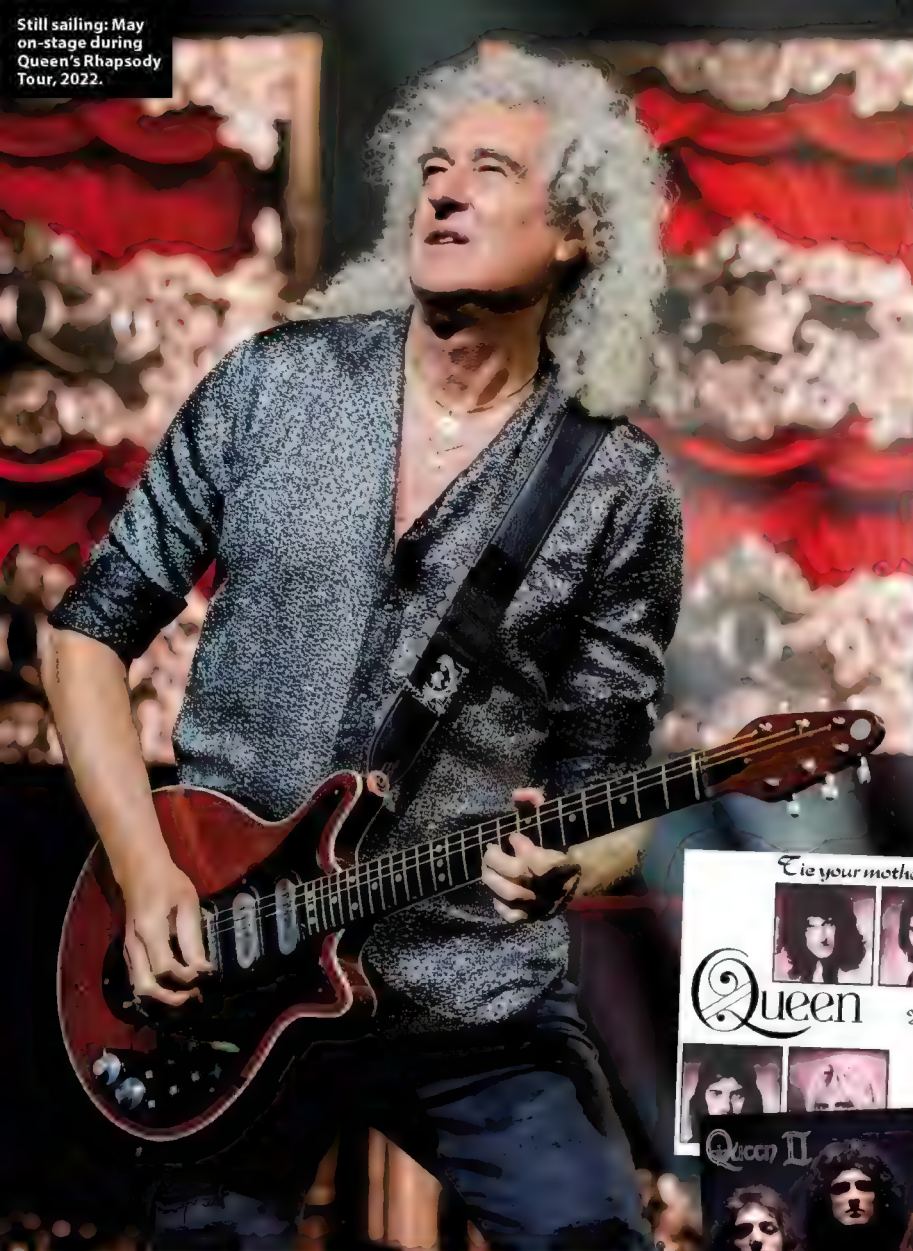




The appliance  
of science:  
Brian May, 1974.

**"EVERY TIME I BROUGHT  
A NEW SONG TO THE BOYS  
I'D BE AS NERVOUS AS  
HELL, THINKING, THEY'RE  
GONNA SAY IT'S RUBBISH,  
THEY'RE GONNA HATE IT."**





### Can you remember the first song you ever wrote?

It was in the Smile days [1968-1970], but I'm not sure what it was called. We're currently revisiting [1974's] *Queen II*, and one early song that didn't get on the album was Polar Bear, which we'd recorded with Smile, and Freddie sang later. Another very early song which has never made it onto any record was The Real Life, which was about a kid walking through some kind of psychedelic scenario (laughs). But I still think of Queen's first single, Keep Yourself Alive, as one of my first songs. I had that riff in my pocket for a long time before Queen.

### The bar was set high in your first band, 1984, by The Beatles and Otis Redding covers you played...

Yes, I'd be playing Eddie Floyd's Knock On Wood and [Wilson Pickett's] In The Midnight Hour, and thinking, How can I possibly be in the same league as the people who wrote these songs? In the beginning, I don't think I had the confidence to consider myself a songwriter. Actually, I don't know if I have it now.

### That's surprising to hear.

Well, you always have these doubts. There's a part of you that thinks, Hey, I can do this. I can do anything. But there's another part that thinks, Who am I? It's a journey of self-belief

and you have to embolden yourself.

### What songwriters influenced you?

Was it David Hockney who said, "All art is theft"? (laughs). Buddy Holly, Hank Marvin, The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, they're all in there – and Rodgers And Hammerstein. When I wrote "There's a place for us..." on Who Wants To Live Forever, I swear I'd never made the connection with the same lyric from Somewhere from West Side Story. But it's in there.

### Did you find it difficult to write about your life and emotions?

The answer is yes, but I was determined to do it. My songs are always about relationships. Sometimes I'm singing about someone else's experience, sometimes it's me. But I prefer not to explain it because you can reveal too much and lay yourself bare.

I try and draw on the universal experience. I don't know if this sounds a bit obscure but think of Maria from West Side Story again. "I've just met a girl named Maria..." It's a universal song that uses the metaphor of this one girl to describe what love is, and it's one of the most perfect songs ever.

### Did you find it daunting playing your song ideas to the rest of Queen?

Every time I brought a new song to the boys I'd be as nervous as hell, thinking, They're gonna say it's rubbish, they're gonna hate it. I'd always be embarrassed and apologising. That never ever went away.

### Were the others the same presenting their songs?

I don't know (pauses). John Deacon was self-conscious because he didn't sing, so his way of presenting a song was to show Freddie the words and get Freddie to sing the tune. Deacy had a certain tentative approach.

### It's difficult for us to imagine Freddie Mercury being tentative in the studio.

Deep down Freddie was one of the shyest people I've ever met, but he was so full of bluster you'd forget. Freddie would always be excited, and his excitement would take over – "I've got something to tell you. I don't know what you think of this, but you just have to listen!" He'd be so full of excitement he could hardly speak. Freddie's ideas were off the wall and cheeky and different – and we tended to encourage them. Sometimes the idea he brought in was brilliant, and sometimes not brilliant.

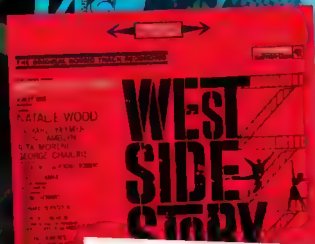
### Can you recall one of the not brilliant ones?

Yes and I'll tell you a story. Freddie came up with a lot of album titles, very good titles too. But he came in one day and announced, "I've got this amazing idea. You know Michael Jackson has just put out this album called *Bad*?... Well, listen... What do you think about us calling our next album *Good*?" We all looked at each other and said, "Well, maybe we should think about it Freddie." It wasn't one of his world-shattering ideas, but looking back, maybe we were wrong.





If the cap fits: Queen receive gold discs for *Crazy Little Thing Called Love* from renowned socialite and hat model Gertrude Shilling at Legends nightclub, London, December 13, 1979.



Deacon songs per album had doubled. Were they hustling to get more material on those records?

I think there was a realisation that if you wrote a song and your name was on it, there was money to be made. Everybody in every group suddenly thinks, Hang on, I'm getting left behind here...

This is what creates the most ill-feeling in a band – the realisation that the guy who wrote the song is making all this money and everybody else is enabling him by going on tour and playing it. That's what groups break up over. So that's an impetus, but it's also about having your creativity represented, not feeling sidelined.

By the end of the decade, Roger Taylor had really started to emerge as a writer too.

Roger very hurriedly wrote his first song, *Modern Times Rock'n'Roll*, on *Queen I*. But by the time you get to the '80s and *Radio Ga Ga* and later *These Are The Days Of Our Lives* he'd become a great songwriter. I'm thinking of George Harrison, who wasn't a major songwriter in The Beatles, but by the time you get to *Something* and *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*, you realised that talent was there all the while.

There's a running gag in the movie *Bohemian Rhapsody* where 'Brian' [played by Gwilym Lee] complains about 'Roger' [Ben Hardy] getting his song *I'm In Love With My Car* on the B-side of *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Fact or fiction?

There was a lot of truth in that (laughs). We were aware of the supreme injustice of *I'm In Love With My Car* making as much money as *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

It was a real sticking point for the band and it's good we got through it. I think our sense of humour saved us. How long did it take me to get over it?... Oh, quite a while.

QUEEN'S IMPERIAL REIGN throughout the '70s (six UK Top 5 albums; three US Top 5s; seven UK Top 20 singles) was always offset by ➤

**"FREDDIE ANNOUNCED, 'YOU KNOW MICHAEL JACKSON HAS JUST PUT OUT THIS ALBUM CALLED BAD?... WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT US CALLING OUR NEXT ALBUM GOOD?'"**

QUEEN'S FIRST THREE ALBUMS, *Queen I*, *Queen II* and 1974's *Sheer Heart Attack*, were dominated by Mercury and May's songwriting; an arrangement that paid off after Mercury's *Killer Queen* gave them a breakthrough UK Number 2 hit.

Yet its defining harmonies displayed Queen at their collaborative best. May was hospitalised with a stomach ulcer when the others first worked on the song. When he emerged from his sick bed, he told Mercury "the backing vocals are abrasive" and demanded they re-record them.

"But it was Freddie's idea that whoever wrote the lyrics would claim the song," explains May. "None of us argued with that and it became the norm, but looking back, it wasn't always very accurate."

**Are a lot of Queen songs more collaborative than the credits suggest?**

Yes, we were always interactive. Things like *Seven Seas Of Rhye* and *Liar* were Freddie's lyrics but my riffs. But the songwriting process in Queen was very complex. Freddie or I would bring in an idea and it would get pulled apart, worked on and rebuilt by the whole group.

**In the '70s especially, it seemed like you wanted your guitar to sound like an instrument that hadn't yet been invented. How much did this influence your writing?**

I think it's the other way round, really. But maybe it's a chicken and egg situation. I was reaching for a complexity in the songs and the arrangements, that went right back to *Smile* and, later, the three-part guitar harmonies on *The Night Comes Down* and *Keep Yourself Alive*. I always had this idea in my head of a guitar speaking like an orchestra and not just a solo instrument.

**Are there certain traits you recognise in Roger Taylor and John Deacon's songs?**

Yes, but I can't tell you what they are because that would be naughty of me (laughs). I think Roger would say to you that it's very simplistic with him. He thinks in barre chords on the whole. My contribution would be to come in and make the melodies work better. It's a humble task but that's what I've done on Roger's songs – add a bit of colour. We all had our strengths and weaknesses, though, and we covered for each other.

**What about John Deacon's songs?**

Well, Deacy normally wouldn't let me in (sighs). He always wanted to play guitar on his tracks. I'd end up putting a bit of sherbet on his songs – a bit of extra fire. But Freddie was very good at interacting with John. Songs like *Cool Cat* [on 1982's *Hot Space*] and *My Baby Does Me* [on 1989's *The Miracle*] were Freddie encouraging John.

**Is there a particular Queen album where the songwriting really fell into place for you?**

I know I sound like I'm advertising *Queen II*, but it's the single biggest step we made in terms of songwriting and production. On the first album [1973's *Queen I*] we didn't have much time, so our attitude was, Oh God, let's get our ideas on tape as quick as we can. So we just whacked it out there.

On *Queen II* we had the time and the budget and we could do the things we always dreamed of doing – the guitar harmonies and arrangements on something like *The March Of The Black Queen*, which I think is the equal of anything Freddie ever wrote. There are a lot of flaws on *Queen II*, but as artists we were getting into an area nobody else had got into before.

By the time of *News Of The World* (1977) and *Jazz* (1978), the quota of Taylor and





Mine, all ermine: Mercury and May light up Wembley Stadium, 1986; (opposite, clockwise from top left) Brian May at Kempton Park for the Day At The Races Hurdle, October 16, 1976; Freddie Mercury at home, 1969; John Deacon on-stage, 1975.

◀ critical disdain. “We were destroyed in the music press,” says May. “If I’d been a solo artist it would have been hard to take. But because we were a band, we were like, Fuck all that! What do they know?”

Part of the problem for their detractors was that Queen were impossible to second guess, following *Bohemian Rhapsody* with Deacon’s devy-eyed love song *You’re My Best Friend* and Mercury’s gospel knees-up *Somebody To Love*.

Their 1978 double A-side of Mercury’s *Bicycle Race* and May’s *Fat Bottomed Girls* (“a sort of pansexual song,” he once told MOJO) encapsulates Queen at their schizophrenic best: witty, provocative and slightly absurd...

#### Do people sometimes overlook the humour in Queen’s music?

Sometimes. It was there but it was only part of what we did. We always took the music seriously but not ourselves. There was always that layer of humour but also insecurity. It’s like when Freddie said we should use the title *Tie Your Mother Down*. When I thought about it, I realised it was funny, yes, but it also summed up teenage angst, and that frustration we had as kids with our parents. That’s when the song completely fell into place.

**You once said, “In our music sex is either implied or referred to semi-jokingly. But it’s always there.” Queen never sang about sex in that overt way like, say, Led Zeppelin did.**

Oh no, no (*sighs*). God, we’re probably closer to George Formby than Robert Plant. Though Led Zeppelin were a total inspiration to us. But not just the music, it was the way they handled themselves and their image. The ethos behind Zeppelin was a massive inspiration.

**Queen albums became even more eclectic, with synthesizers and dance influences on 1980’s *The Game*. Did you feel a responsibility to fly**

**the flag for Queen’s traditional rock side?**

Yes. I didn’t want to let it go. That’s why you’ve got *Put Out The Fire and Dancer* on an album [*Hot Space*] which doesn’t have anything else like that on it. *Dancer* was done on a Linn drum machine which was very *un-rock*, but the song was an attempt to bring rock into dance.

**What did you think of *Another One Bites The Dust* when you first heard it?**

In all honesty I thought it was very daring, different and catchy. It was John’s song but Freddie was a fierce advocate for it. As soon as I heard Freddie torturing himself to sing those high passages, I thought, OK, I don’t quite know what it is, but it is great. John played the clean rhythmic guitar and I went in and did the filthy stuff, which I think helped the song a lot.

**By now Queen were spending months at a time living and working in Munich: recording in the bunker-like Musicland Studios and embracing the local nightlife. How much did this affect the writing?**

Very much. We used to spend our nights in a rock disco called *The Sugar Shack* [immortalised in “Take me back to the Shack...” from May’s song *Dragon Attack*]. We had a strange relationship with dance music, because in the beginning we were very anti, but we were aware people liked to dance to our music. At *The Sugar Shack* we’d be inebriated or in some strange space and we’d see the effect some songs had on people, and we didn’t like the effect Queen’s music had.

**In what way?**

Our music wasn’t suitable. It didn’t have enough space in it. So often we’d go back to the studio

in the early hours of the morning to search for that thing which would move people’s bodies. It was a very conscious decision. That’s why the album was called *Hot Space*. We wanted to leave spaces in the music, so it sounded good when played on a huge system in a room dedicated to getting people excited.

**Are there any of your songs you think should have been bigger hits or shown a bit more love?**

All of them (*laughs*). I’m constantly thinking that. Something like *Sail Away Sweet Sister*. Everybody said, “It should be a single... Why isn’t it a single?” But other things happened instead. *39* was never a single, but neither was *We Will Rock You* [the B-side of *We Are The Champions*], really, but it became a hit, which made me very happy.

**Did you ever experience writer’s block?**

All the time, and it was always painful. I remember being in Rockfield Studios making *A Night At The Opera*, and being really ill. I was struggling with *The Prophet’s Song*. But I could hear Freddie exploring on the piano, doing these wonderful things that would end up on *Bohemian Rhapsody*, and I was sat there, wanting to throw up, thinking, I am dead.

**After *The Miracle* [1989] Queen took the decision to credit the songs four ways. Did your working relationship become even more collaborative?**

Yes. On *The Show Must Go On*, I only had one afternoon with Freddie – who was ill by then. I was nervous because I wasn’t going to say, Freddie, this is about you. But at the same time it’s a song about a clown who’s suffering and has to paint his smile on. We only wrote one verse together – that was all we managed that afternoon – but it was enough to push me forward with the song. A few weeks later, Freddie came back to record the vocal. He could hardly stand, but he’s propping himself up, knocking





## FREDDIE: THE ART SCHOOL YEARS

# "I REMEMBER THINKING, WHAT A SWEET GUY, BUT WHAT A LOSER!"

Between 1967 and 1971, photographer **DEREK RIDGERS** attended Ealing Art College with Freddie Mercury. "Everybody liked him and so did I – even when he stole my girlfriend."

FREDDIE WAS two years ahead of me. He didn't come into the art school that much, but when he did, he was always beautifully dressed and usually surrounded by females – he was a rather handsome, sophisticated fellow in his beautiful flared slacks and purple-dyed granddad vest. He was one of the first people I saw who had proper stacked-heel leather boots. Everybody liked him and so did I – even when he stole my first girlfriend who I was in love with.

It was just before we broke up for Easter in 1968 on my foundation year, and the whole art school was pretty much packed into the Castle pub across the road, standing room only, and my girlfriend was sitting on my knee. I got up to use the bathroom and when I came back Freddie is sitting in my seat, and she's sitting on his knee. I thought, Well, I'll stand next to him, and she'll turf him out, and we'll go back to how things were, but it didn't happen. After about two minutes of being ignored, I stormed off in a huff, and that was it between me and her.

I can say that I did actually play once with Freddie Mercury, just the two of us. Ealing was well known for good musicians like Pete Townshend and Ron Wood, and often people would bring in instruments, mostly nylon string Spanish guitars, and one or two people might have an electric guitar and a bass, and we'd have a bit of a jam session doing 12-bar blues. There was one jam session with a whole load of us, and gradually people drifted off back to what they should have been doing, and at the end there was just me and Freddie jamming together. He was quite good on the guitar with a lot of rhythm and barre chords, and might have used open tunings, not very common back in the '60s.

I used to play football sometimes at lunchtime with one of the founders of Smile, Tim Staffell, so got quite friendly. Rather than the lecture theatre where I paid sixpence to see David Bowie, I saw Smile play in the Student Union bar. There weren't many people there and I didn't think they were very good, with Freddie obviously trying to be Robert Plant. Tim left Smile to join Humpty Bong with Colin Petersen who had been in the Bee Gees.

I still have a very strong recollection of Freddie's degree show, based on Jimi Hendrix – some Jimi Hendrix pictures which he'd obviously traced and coloured in, and he printed out some Hendrix lyrics. I remember thinking, What a nice bloke but his work isn't very good. In fact, if he hadn't been such a nice bloke, he would never have got as far as his degree show – he would have been booted out.

When he left art school, he worked in Kensington Antique Market, selling the same sort of stacked-heel leather boots he used to wear. I often used to go in because you could get the American Rolling Stone there. I'd chat to him, and I remember thinking, What a sweet guy, but what a loser!

The last time I saw him would have been 1975 at Betty Davis's gig at Ronnie Scott's – she did two sets and I photographed both of them; she was very good. Afterwards I saw Freddie, and we had a beer for old times' sake. I'm not sure I realised he was gay even then, when he was probably wearing leather chaps and things on-stage. I might have been a little bit slow on the uptake! He was very friendly as ever, a charming man.

As told to Mat Snow

**"FREDDIE WAS QUITE GOOD ON THE GUITAR, AND MIGHT HAVE USED OPEN TUNINGS, NOT VERY COMMON BACK IN THE '60s."**

back the vodka and saying, "Play the fucking tape! I'll get it" – and he was stupendous.

**I**N THE DECADE FOLLOWING Mercury's death in November 1991, May and Taylor dabbled in solo careers and Deacon retired completely. Queen's second coming began with the 2002 launch of their jukebox musical, *We Will Rock You*, which re-introduced the music to theatregoers worldwide over the next 12 years.

The show's success was compounded by Queen's decision to tour again with guest vocalist Adam Lambert, and the release of 2018's \$910.8 million-grossing *Bohemian Rhapsody* movie. A new generation discovered Queen's frontman through actor Rami Malek's Oscar-winning performance, but also the band's canny licensing of their music to ad agencies: Flash for floor cleaner, You're My Best Friend for mobile phones, Don't Stop Me Now for chocolate and bank cards... Mercury, presumably, would have been amused to hear *We Are The Champions* soundtracking a Canadian TV commercial for Viagra.

### Queen have never been precious about licensing their music for TV adverts.

It was a conscious decision to do that but not one taken lightly. I always remember in [Oliver Stone's] film about The Doors, where someone wants to use *Light My Fire* in an advert but the band refuse because they don't want to taint their songwriting. Well, our songs are for people to use any way they want, so why would we be precious about it?

The only thing is, we have stopped them being used to promote violence or abuse, during the heyday of gangster rap when someone wanted to sample it in a song we thought was abusive to women. But otherwise our songs are

for everyone. Like I said, all art is theft.

**Do you ever feel protective of Queen's songs once they're in the public domain? For example, Don't Stop Me Now, which was Freddie Mercury celebrating his hedonistic lifestyle, has become a universal party anthem.**

At the time [1979] I didn't feel comfortable about Don't Stop Me Now, probably for all the right reasons and the wrong reasons. I think I resisted realising why people liked it for a long time. Now I think people love it *because* it contains all their dark dreams of hedonism – and that's fine.

I hear it all the time, though. People say to me, "Who Wants To Live Forever feels like it was written for me, or my mum or my dad..." It's in people's hearts and minds and becomes personal to them. That's what makes a song live on.

### Out of the four songwriters, were you the biggest perfectionist in Queen?

Yes. A horrible perfectionist – and it's a disease.

### Is that perfectionism the scientist in you coming out?

I've always maintained that art and science are the same thing, really, but people look at me weirdly when I say that. The thing is awareness. I'm aware of my perfectionism but some of the greatest things happen when you're not being a perfectionist – when you let it happen instinctively. Songwriting is the balance between art and science – the planned and the unplanned, passion and logic. All of those things are in the best art and the best science.

### Could you imagine writing another song for Queen again?

I think it could happen. Both Roger and I are constantly writing and coming up with ideas and doing things in our studios. I could have the beginnings of a Queen song right there in front of me now. It's just whether the idea reaches maturity or not. It's whether that seed can grow.



Dual personalities:  
Mercury and Bowie  
gear up for the  
pressure drop.



# "THERE WAS SO MUCH BLOW"

Take "a few bottles of wine", white powder racked out on gold discs, stir in some clashing Big Singer Energy and *voilà*, you have Under Pressure, the Queen song they can't quite believe they made happen. "Five egos in the studio could be a bit much," discovers **MARK BLAKE**.

**D**AVID BOWIE ONCE DESCRIBED HIS AND QUEEN'S collaborative UK Number 1 hit as "spontaneous and peculiar". A bit like the song's two lead singers, then. Bowie and Freddie Mercury went way back; not that they ever discussed it publicly. In spring 1969, the unknown, pre-Space Oddity Bowie played a lunchtime gig at Ealing art school, where Freddie Bulsara helped him build a stage out of tables in the college refectory.

Two years later, at a stall he was managing in London's Kensington Market, Freddie tried to sell Bowie a pair of platform boots. By summer 1981, though, the scales had tipped. Bowie was in creative limbo after *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)* but Queen had recently topped the US singles chart with *Another One Bites The Dust*.

Queen and Bowie ran into each other at Mountain Studios, Montreux, where Queen were working on *Hot Space*, and Bowie was recording *Cat People (Putting Out Fire)* for the erotic horror movie *Cat People*. One night, Bowie sang backing vocals on Queen's new song, *Cool Cat*, and decided to stick around.

"Bowie kept popping into the studio," recalled Freddie Mercury in 1985. "And we were jamming to some of his songs and some of ours. We had a few bottles of wine and things."

Not all of Queen partook, but apparently one of their road crew was instructed to remove a gold disc from the studio wall to use as a chopping board for cocaine.

"There was so much blow, but I needed a clear mind, not all that verbal diarrhoea," *Hot Space*'s German co-producer Reinhold Mack told MOJO. During the long night that followed, Mott The Hoople's *All The Young Dudes* and *All The Way From Memphis* and Cream's *I Feel Free* and *N.S.U.* were among the songs Bowie and Queen jammed on.

Apparently, Bowie then suggested they try and write something new together. Queen had an unfinished song titled *Feel Like*, which became the basis for *Under Pressure*.

After recording a backing track, Bowie suggested he and Mercury go into the vocal booth separately and sing a melody each, without hearing what the other had done. It seemed like a typical Bowie idea: like the musical equivalent of William Burroughs's cut-up technique.





Although, not quite, as a cheeky Bowie eavesdropped on Mercury's scatting vocal ("B-b-b-boom-ba... Dadadee-da-de-da", etc) before recording his own. "Afterwards Freddie was very impressed by David's contribution," recalled Mack. "I said, It's easy when you're standing in the doorway listening. To which Freddie replied, 'Oh, what a cunt.'"

**C**ONSIDERING THE VINO AND OTHER substances consumed, memories of the session are understandably cloudy. What isn't in dispute, however, is how much Bowie took control, writing most of the lyrics and ditching the song's proposed title, *People On Streets*. However, Bowie always insisted, despite John Deacon claiming otherwise, that it was Deacon and not him who came up with the song's now world-famous bass line.

Brian May, especially, felt the song had been hijacked. "We were all very pig-headed," he said, "but Bowie was probably as pig-headed as the four of us put together."

May eventually stepped away from the song, leaving Bowie, Mercury, Taylor and Mack to mix the track at New York's Power Station. Nobody could agree on anything, the desk broke down and Mack walked out, losing a production credit on the final song.

Confusing matters further, Jon Bon Jovi, then still John Bongiovi Jr, a 19-year-old gopher working for his cousin at the Power Station, insists he saw Bowie and Mercury recording vocals together. "Nobody believes me, but I looked through the window of Studio A and saw them. I am not mistaken," he said in 2021.

Nobody seemed entirely happy with the end results either. "There were continual disagreements about how *Under Pressure* should be put out or if it should even be put out at all," said May, who was furious at how under-represented he was in the final mix. "Looking back now, I think it's a very special, significant song for us. But I would love to sit down quietly on my own and remix it."

For a long time, Queen insisted *Cool Cat* and *Under Pressure* were the only recorded collaborations between the band and Bowie. Though, in 2021, Roger Taylor admitted, "If we look in the archives there is probably other stuff." It's rumoured these include a version of what became the 1984 Queen B-side *I Go Crazy*, with Bowie and Mercury ad-libbing different lyrics.

**"LOOKING BACK NOW, IT'S A VERY SPECIAL SONG FOR US. BUT I WOULD LOVE TO REMIX IT." BRIAN MAY**

## ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST

The three Queen bass players who preceded John Deacon. They didn't last long, notes MARK BLAKE.

### Mike Grose

(June – July 1970)

Mike Grose moved up to London from his native Cornwall to join the newly formed Queen. Mercury took him clothes shopping before their debut gig, but Grose split the crotch of his new velvet trousers on the train home. Was it a bad omen? Grose played a handful of dates before realising he needed a proper job and joining his family's haulage business. "Mike was a massive and monolithic bass player," said Brian May after Grose's death in 2019.

### Harry Mitchell

(July 1970 – January 1971)

A friend of a friend of Roger Taylor's, Mitchell's early performance with Queen at London's Imperial College in August 1970 was included on last year's *Queen I* box set. He played 11 dates with the band but bowed out after a support slot to Genesis. "I wanted to do something more soulful," said Mitchell, who later took a job at the Ealing branch of electrical retailers Dixons, where he recalled selling John Deacon a plug.

### Douglas Bogle

(February 1971)



Eighteen-year-old trainee telephone technician Bogle lasted for two Queen gigs (opening for the *Pretty Things* at Hornsey Town Hall and Yes at Kingston Polytechnic) before being let go for being too animated on-stage. "I wish they'd said something. No one told me they didn't like it," said Bogle, who later released a novelty single, 1975's *Away In A Manger*, as Colonel Doug Bogle for Ringo Starr's Ring O Records.

**D**ESPITE EVERYONE'S MISGIVINGS, *Under Pressure* was released as a single in October 1981 and gave Queen their first UK Number 1 single since *Bohemian Rhapsody* and Bowie his first since 1980's *Ashes To Ashes*. Like *Bohemian Rhapsody*, *Under Pressure* was an unusual pop hit: naggingly memorable and melodramatic but full of spontaneous, peculiar twist and turns. In many ways, it reflected the studio dynamic: sounding like Bowie and Queen having a musical arm-wrestling match. Sometimes Bowie gets Queen to submit, sometimes Bowie folds.

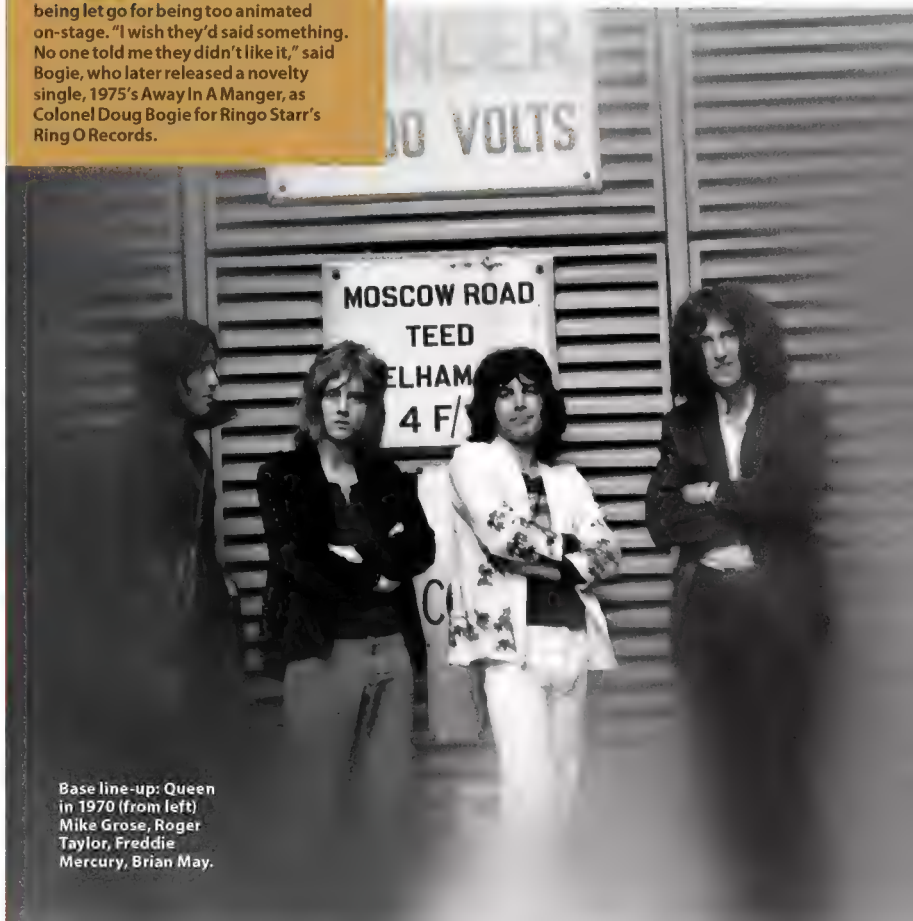
However, *Under Pressure* barely troubled the American Top 30 until almost a decade later, when pop-rapper Vanilla Ice used its bass line and piano hook for his 1990 hit *Ice Ice Baby*, believing that adding an extra note excused him from needing permission. Ice eventually avoided a court case by adding Queen and Bowie's names to the writing credits and giving them a chunk of the royalties.

*Under Pressure* was the first and last time Queen with Freddie Mercury collaborated with another musician. Perhaps once was enough, as Bowie suddenly insisted his backing vocals be excised from the song *Cool Cat* as he didn't think they were good enough, thereby delaying the release of *Hot Space*.

Still, one can't help wondering what a Queen and David Bowie album would have sounded like. Could they have managed to make one without killing each other?

"I love *Under Pressure*," said Roger Taylor, "and I wish we'd done more with Bowie. But five egos in the studio could be a bit much."

Photo by Douglas Pudfoot. © Queen Productions Ltd.



Base line-up: Queen in 1970 (from left) Mike Grose, Roger Taylor, Freddie Mercury, Brian May.



# "CARS AND GIRLS. WHAT ELSE IS THERE?"

Would MOJO's delve into the songworld of **QUEEN** be complete without their rhythmic spine, keener of their high harmonies and author of I'm In Love With My Car? Of course not.

"Brian was like, 'Is this a joke?'" **ROGER TAYLOR** tells **JAMES McNAIR**.

Portrait by **MICK ROCK**.

**D**AYS BEFORE MOJO'S CHAT WITH Roger Taylor, news breaks of Crazy Little Thing Called Love reaching one billion plays on Spotify. A Freddie Mercury song, that one, but having penned Queen smashes such as Radio Ga Ga and A Kind Of Magic – plus Bohemian Rhapsody's B-side I'm In Love With My Car – Queen's drummer has also known the lucrative gift of residuals.

"Later we credited every song to the whole band," he says, the voice a warm, familiar rasp. "Something like The Show Must Go On was really Brian, whereas These Are The Days Of Our Lives is my song. It was Freddie's idea, bless him, to split everything equally after a while. He was very generous that way. You win and you lose but it felt like the grown-up thing to do."

Regardless of how the pie's been sliced, Queen has afforded Taylor, now 75, a rather regal existence. MOJO is told he'll likely talk from one of his boats, but in the end he's at one of his mansions; the helipad-appointed one in an idyllic Cornish village with "a beautiful view down the River Helford".

The location has resonance. Prior to Queen, prior to his joining Brian May in Smile in 1968, Taylor grew up in nearby Truro and served a covers band apprenticeship in Beat Unlimited and The Reaction. He was a singing drummer destined for bigger things. Confident. Gifted. Kit stationed front-of-stage.

In Queen, says Taylor, he got to "live the dream". Blond and flamboyant, possessed of a castrato-pitch wail, he relished his playboy image and once told People magazine his greatest misery was "not being 18 forever". Fifty years since their contributions to Bohemian Rhapsody engraved their names in pop culture history, it's hard not to think of him and May as the opposite poles of Queen, the personification of everything earnest and frivolous, complex and straightforward in their music. ➤

Mick Rock





Blond ambition:  
Roger Taylor, 1974.

**"PEOPLE TALK ABOUT  
FREDDIE'S ANTICS, BUT  
HE WAS FANTASTICALLY  
GIFTED, A REALLY UNIQUE,  
IRREPLACEABLE TALENT."**





Driven to succeed: (from left) Roger Taylor, 2020; Taylor behind the kit and Mercury on the mike during the You're My Best Friend video shoot, June 25, 1976.



◀ **One billion plays on Spotify! Do such statistics still astound you?**

Every time I hear something like that I'm still delighted. Because if people are still listening that much, we must in some miraculous way still be relevant. When did Crazy Little Thing come out? 1980? [October 1979]. Freddie wrote it in the bath at the Munich Hilton, I think. I remember the recording session so well. Just Freddie on acoustic guitar, myself and John [Deacon] down in the basement at Musicland Studios. One take.

**That was one of Freddie's, of course. What's your favourite song of his?**

God! Where do we start? Let's say Somebody To Love. You never knew what Freddie was going to bring in, and that song is on another level. We became a rock band that could do gospel. People talk about Freddie's stage antics or about his teeth or whatever, but he was fantastically gifted, a really unique, irreplaceable talent.

**Let's go further back. Do you remember the**

**"WHO WANTS TO LIVE FOREVER IS A GREAT BRIAN SONG. BUT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EVEN BETTER IF HE'D LET FREDDIE SING ALL OF IT."**

THESE ARE THE DAYS OF OUR LIVES

to that, but really I was in covers bands doing Hendrix, Cream, Dylan and lots of soul stuff all through my school years. Thanks to people like Little Richard and The Beatles I knew that you needed to create your own material if you were to become a well-rounded artist, but I didn't really get going until later, after I met Freddie. Fred had songwriting in his genes.

**Which songwriters have influenced you most?**

I'd say John Lennon and Bob Dylan. Stuff like Forever Young and If Not For You – they're such beautiful sentiments. Bob's later stuff like *Rough And Rowdy Ways*, too. That really helped me through that whole bloody Covid thing. It was so uplifting and you felt there was still a bit of intelligence in the world.

**Is there a song you consider perfect?**

Ooh, that's tough. Lennon's Jealous Guy, maybe?

**Do you find it relatable?**

Absolutely! It's always about the songs that affect you in some way, isn't it? In My Life by The Beatles, too.

**Brian always says you were much better at being a rock star than him, and it's present in your early songwriting – like Tenement Funster [from *Sheer Heart Attack*] where you boast about your funky purple shoes and sex appeal...**

I was living the dream *(laughs)*. Or trying to. I'd played the game and gone to university and everything [Dentistry at London Hospital Medical College in 1968, then a BSc in biology at North East London Polytechnic], but that was just a cunning plan to get to London and join a band. I wanted to be in a gang working

**first song you wrote?**

Well the first one I'll own up to is Modern Times Rock 'N' Roll [from *Queen I*]. It was an instinctive, kind of glam rock thing, but a bit hurried. I'd written a few half-songs prior

together as a team, and somewhere along the way I unashamedly took up that rock star/playboy mantle which some might now say was rather clichéd. Fine *(laughs)*. I was very happy with it all.

**On *A Night At The Opera's* I'm In Love With My Car, you sing, "Told my girl I'd have to forget her/Rather buy me a new carburettor," then rev your Alfa Romeo. Was everyone down with that?**

Brian was like, "Is this a joke?" *(laughs)*. I said, Look at all those people out washing their cars on a Sunday morning, lavishing attention on them – they probably love their cars more than they love their wives. It's a valid lyric I think, but kind of tongue in cheek, too, obviously.

**Brian's solo song Driven By You was later used in a BMW ad...**

True! He got a lot of stick for that – and a lot of money. Still, if you're going to take the king's shilling...

**There's a long tradition of songs concerning cars, girls and braggadocio. Chuck Berry and Marc Bolan, Prince's Little Red Corvette...**

Cars and girls, yes. What else is there? And think of dear old Marc singing "I drive a Rolls-Royce/Cos it's good for my voice" [in *Children Of The Revolution*]. I mean, come on! That's great. That's funny. Marc was a lovely guy. A sweet guy.

**Which of Brian and John Deacon's songs do you most admire?**

Who Wants To Live Forever [from 1986's *A Kind Of Magic*] is a great Brian song. But it would have been even better if he'd let Freddie sing all of it. I think it's slightly over-arranged, too, but wonderful all the same. With John's stuff I love the simplicity of I Want To Break Free. I think it was a bit of a cry from the heart, actually...

**In what sense?**

Not in the sense of wanting to break free from Queen or touring. It was more some kind of personal crisis, I believe.

**Were you nervous when presenting new songs to each other?**

Lola Teng Taylor





## ALL THAT GLITTERS...

ROGER TAYLOR remembers Queen's turn on Larry Lurex And The Voles from Venus: "I think we got £15 each."

FREDDIE MERCURY'S posthumous appearance on Queen's 1995 *Made In Heaven* album brought everything full-circle in more ways than one. The singer's final recording was *Mother Love*, a poignant co-write with May in which he sings, "I've walked too long in this lonely lane." Among other things, the song's sound-collage coda taps a July 1986 Wembley Stadium recording of Mercury's famed "Ay-oh!" call-and-response shtick, and a few seconds of Larry Lurex And The Voles from Venus's 1972 recording of Gerry Goffin and Carole King's *Goin' Back*.

Larry Lurex was actually Mercury, singing on the B-side of a cover of The Ronettes' *I Can Hear Music*. Not released until 1973, the single was a pet project of Robin Geoffrey Cable, a little-known but capable producer who had gently press-ganged three-quarters of Queen into service. They were lounging around waiting for late-night session time to become available at Soho's Trident Studios, and Cable got them to make a decent fist of Phil Spector's wall of sound.

The Voles included Brian May and Roger Taylor, but not John Deacon, who was absent that day. Drawing inspiration from the prevailing glam band argot, Cable's pseudonymous credit for Queen was coined to avoid any confusion as the band prepared to release their long overdue debut, *Queen I*.

"I think Robin also suggested the name 'Terry Tinkle' for Freddie," recalls Taylor today. The drummer's chief memory of the Larry Lurex recordings is of "lots of session guys with acoustic guitars, because Robin wanted that Spector-ish thing – lots of layers. I think we got £15 each, which we were probably quite grateful for at the time." Engineered by key Queen collaborator Mike Stone, the single was credited only to Larry Lurex when released on both EMI and US label Anthem. At the time of writing you can buy an EMI copy on Discogs for £78.99.

On *I Can Hear Music*, May's distinctive sound/way with guitar orchestration is already apparent during his solo, while Taylor plays maracas and tambourine. Cable opted to vari-speed everything to make Mercury's voice more Ronettes-like. "Yeah, I think I prefer *Goin' Back*," says Taylor. "Freddie's voice already sounds so wonderful on that."

James McNair

**Long before Freddie's death, you were the first Queen member to make a solo record, 1981's *Fun In Space*. Why?**

Because I wanted to play everything myself and not go through that famous filtering process you mentioned. The album didn't set the heather alight, but it was [late Foo Fighters drummer] Taylor Hawkins' favourite LP, apparently.

**Going back to *I'm In Love With My Car*, in the Queen biopic *Bohemian Rhapsody*, 'Brian' [Gwilym Lee] repeatedly asks 'you' [Ben Hardy], "So what is the sexiest part of a car?" Thoughts?**

It's the radiator grille.

**As *Bohemian Rhapsody*'s B-side, that song also did rather well royalties-wise. Has Brian forgiven you?**

No, he's never forgiven me. And I've never stopped laughing about it!

**Isn't it all academic after the first £50 million?**

Ha! No comment.

Always. I used to make a little demo and see how that went down (*laughs*). It's true that Brian and I had an advantage over John because we could sing, but Freddie was an enormous help to John in his writing – and to all of us, actually. We'd say, "You're the leader," and he'd say, "No, no – I'm the singer."

**Could putting something through the Queen 'filter' make a decent song great?**

Up to a point. We all worked really hard on the arrangements and we were fortunate to have a lot of colours and different tools at our disposal. Freddie could get really excited and we'd get swept up in his *joie de vivre*. *Radio Ga Ga* was a bit like that. Freddie got it right away and Brian and John came on board later.

**The operatic, top-layer vocal you brought to *Bohemian Rhapsody* and *In The Lap Of The Gods* was one of Queen's special sauces.**

I just happened to be able to sing very high in full-voice, and then I'd sometimes use falsetto, too. My falsetto's crap now, though! I'm no Justin Hawkins.

**Brian says of your songwriting: "I think Roger would say it's very simplistic with him. He thinks in barre chords as a whole. My contribution was to make the melodies work better." Fair?**

Not really, no! I'd take issue with quite a lot of that. It's a little bit, OK, so you've got a piano – now I'm going to come in and tune it. I don't only think in barre chords – that's a slightly arrogant statement to make. Brian's a perfectionist and he will chase down the detail, but that didn't mean I was going to let him fuck up my songs!

**How would you categorise Freddie, Brian and John's songwriting?**

Freddie's stuff is uncategorisable, really. There's too much scope. His lyrics were always great too. I don't think I ever saw him read a book, but he was getting that stuff from somewhere. John, right from the start, was coming from a different place than the rest of us. He liked Tamla Motown, soul and funk. You hear that on *Another One Bites The Dust*, of course.

**And Brian's songs?**

Brian's stuff is steeped in hard rock and rock'n'roll. He brought great riffs and power – things like *Now I'm Here* and *Tie Your Mother Down*.

**He says he wasn't at all sure about *Tie Your Mother Down*'s title until Freddie convinced him otherwise. Were you party to that conversation?**

I remember something about it, yes. But why not? It's better than *A Walk To The Grocer*.

**Do you have a dodgy songtitle equivalent?**

*A Nation Of Haircuts*? [from 1998 solo album *Electric Fire*].

**The variety of Queen's songwriting is extraordinary – you were always changing. What were the landmark songs that moved Queen from one stage, or level, to the next?**

*Keep Yourself Alive* [from *Queen I*] was a good calling card. *Seven Seas Of Rhye* [from *Queen II*] even more so. That got us on *Top Of The Pops* and it had power and strong harmonies and said what we were about. Then you have the stadium songs like *We Are The Champions* and *We Will Rock You* taking things to another level. I've always thought of those two as a pair, but later *Radio Ga Ga* was a stadium anthem, too. *Crazy Little Thing Called Love* was landmark too in a way, because it wasn't *Bohemian Rhapsody* – it was easy! Done really quickly with a great feel, then Brian comes in at the end and puts down this '50s-style solo with that impeccable touch of his. He used my brown Fender Telecaster for that, I think.

**For you, personally, *These Are The Days Of Our Lives* from 1991's *Innuendo* seemed landmark. Roger Taylor dropping his guard to write a song which became synonymous with Freddie's passing and the end of Queen.**

It's strange that one. At first it was just, Oh, I'm getting older, I've got kids and time's really passing, but I knew Freddie was ill of course. The video is terribly sad and poignant, and the song has a kind of resigned, stoical feeling.

**"THE NAME 'TERRY TINKLE' WAS ALSO SUGGESTED FOR FREDDIE."**  
ROGER TAYLOR





Just champion: Freddie Mercury takes over Live Aid; (right) Brian May and Roger Taylor backstage with David Bowie.

**"GELDOLF SAID, 'NO, QUEEN HAVE PEAKED. I DON'T THINK THEY SHOULD PLAY.'"**  
**HARVEY GOLDSMITH**



# "WHEN THEY WENT ON, FREDDIE SMELT BLOOD"

**HARVEY GOLDSMITH** on his fight to book Queen for Live Aid, and how it paid off, in spades: "The more Freddie hammed it up, the more the audience lapped it up."

**B**OB GELDOLF AND I WERE PUTTING LIVE AID TOGETHER and going through potential artists. Being the producer, I understood how slots work and who went where. I was also dealing with the technical side: we were doing two shows [London and Philadelphia] and had to stay strictly to time because of the satellite.

I thought about it, and said for the late afternoon slot the perfect act would be Queen. Bob said, "No, they've peaked. I don't think they should play." I said to Bob, I really think they'll be perfect to go on in that 5.30, 6 o'clock type slot — knowing Freddie as I did, I knew they'd really make a show of it. Bob and I went backwards and forwards. I had to do a lot of persuading. He said, "No, we've got other acts we could put on." I dug my heels in and said there's no better act that could do this than Queen. Look, I know about these acts. I know who should play when. When shows open at 12 and go on until 10 at night there is always a lull in proceedings around that slot in the afternoon, so you need someone really cool who can just lift it up. That's become a really important slot in all festivals of that type — Live Aid really showed how it could work.

Also, I had to be very mindful of the technical side, the layout of their equipment and who we could get on and off so that we didn't have too many big acts with huge amounts of equipment one after the other because it would have just delayed things — even though our turntable stage allowed us to have one band playing, one setting up and one coming off. Nevertheless, when you've got a lot of equipment one after the other you need to space it out.

When asked, at first Queen were a bit reluctant. They'd just finished a long tour and were all a bit wrecked and wanted a break. And it was very close to the day. Freddie stood back from it all a bit — I

think he wanted to see what the reaction to Live Aid's announcement was. When he realised the reaction of the press and media and the demand for tickets, he talked to the band and to their manager Jim Beach, and they decided to do it. Of course, they wanted to close the show. And I said, No, I want you to go on at this slot. I think what really swung Freddie over was the thought that he could play to a billion people in one go, live. Nobody had ever done that before. I think he just felt, "OK, I'll show you."

**B**EFORE THE DAY I WENT AROUND AND SPOKE TO everybody and laid it all out. Because we were on such a tight deadline and had such a short period of time to change over, I had to say, I don't care what time you go on but I do care what time you come off. Please stick to your time. And on the morning of the show, as soon as I got down to Wembley I sent a runner around to buy 40 clocks which I dotted around everywhere.

We couldn't allow the acts to mix their own sound, though they could advise, otherwise it would have been chaos. We didn't have time for soundchecks either; there was a line check but it was done silently. I was lucky — I had the most fantastic technicians and team around me.

Queen had rehearsed for a week, and when they went on, Freddie smelt blood. He went for the throat and delivered like nobody else could deliver. And the rest of the band lifted themselves up too — and you lift yourself up even more when it's your hometown.

Freddie became the mass conductor and Queen didn't actually have to do anything because the audience did it for them. The more Freddie hammed it up, the better Brian played his guitar riffs and solos, and the more the audience lapped it up and played it back to the band. It was one feeding the other.

Queen performed a short set, but it was the set of a lifetime, and it transformed them as a band. If you talk about Live Aid, most people go: "Yeah, Queen."

*As told to Mat Snow*



**"HER MAJESTY ...QUEEN!"**

Wembley Stadium, London.  
13.418ST, July 13, 1985.  
That's how we felt in 1985.

Bohemian Rhapsody (segment)  
Radio Ga Ga  
Ay-Oh  
Hammer To Fall  
Crazy Little Thing Called Love  
We Will Rock You  
We Are The Champions



# MOJO FILTER

YOUR GUIDE TO THE MONTH'S BEST MUSIC

EDITED BY JENNY BULLEY [jenny.bulley@bauermedia.co.uk](mailto:jenny.bulley@bauermedia.co.uk)

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"A vision of the past that's almost certainly kidding itself."

JIM IRVIN VISITS A BUHF MUSEUM. BOOKS, P107



# The ties that bind

The family that plays together... A Mississippi matriarch and her family are here to spread the word. David Hutcheon is a believer. Illustration by Borja Bonafuente.

## Annie & The Caldwell

★★★★★

### Can't Lose My (Soul)

LUAKA BOP. CD/DL/LP

**E**IGHTY YEARS AGO, in April 1945, Sister Rosetta Tharpe was Number 2 on the Billboard "race records" chart with *Strange Things Happening Every Day* – fair comment for the month in which Franklin D Roosevelt, Mussolini and Hitler all died. There were also several noteworthy musical events: Richard Strauss completed *Metamorphosen*; Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel* opened; the audience at a hometown performance by the Berlin Philharmonic were offered cyanide as they left the auditorium; and Tharpe's hit was the first gospel record to reach that Billboard countdown.

Often cited as the earliest rock'n'roll track, *Strange Things Happening Every Day* was a genuine attempt to assuage critics who complained that Tharpe was targeting secular audiences. By 1964, when she appeared at a disused Manchester railway station for British television, rock, soul and gospel were three discrete genres... though you wouldn't have known that from her performance. That trinity continue to pick each other's pockets, and while some acts have kept a foot in all camps, many are convinced you can only be in one. Others quietly keep an eye on what the competition is up to.

Miss Annie Brown Caldwell is, according to her children, "old school", a purist, yet the family septet she fronts are anything but. Their music is influenced by Aretha Franklin, Al Green and George Clinton while belonging to the lineage of gospel groups – The Ward Singers, say – who foregrounded personal emotions over communal jubilation, or, like Sam Cooke's *Soul Stirrers*, brought electric guitar to a traditionally a cappella format. The Caldwell's harbour no fear, however, about making the connections explicit: where Chaka Khan sang *Ain't Nobody*, they bring the house down live with *Can't Nobody Do Me Like Jesus*.

Their music bridges the divide: the bass playing of eldest son Willie Jr is the very definition of 'elastic', allowing his vocalists sisters to let their backbones slip; brother Abel lays down a rock-solid beat, steadfast in the knowledge that someone in front of him may get a notion to rhapsodise without warning; and William Sr, Annie's husband, sits quietly to the side, nodding towards Teenie Hodges, Cornell Dupree and Eddie Hazel.

Upfront, is Miss Annie herself, preaching from the depths of her soul and demanding you come with her. The title track epitomises this approach: as a composition, it's little more than two minutes long, built on a walking blues; but then Miss Annie starts improvising – "I ain't going to Hell, y'all" –

warning listeners to walk a righteous path, and the call-and-response between mother and daughters builds for another eight minutes.

Behind her stands Deborah (pronounced D'Bora), a whirlwind whose starting point is No More Drama levels of Mary J Blige-like fire and brimstone, letting the spirit move through her until she lies drained and barefoot on the floor at the end of a show. Wrong, the most straightforward cut on the album, finds Deborah lamenting choices she made after discovering her husband had been slipping and sliding behind her back. The family that prays together, however, stays together: beside her are her sister Anjessica and Miss Annie's goddaughter Toni Rivers – like Abel, they are the rocks upon which this church is built.

At home in West Point, Mississippi, the Caldwell's have been a closely guarded secret for more than 25 years, recording two CDs for the Memphis-based Ecco label (*Answer Me* in 2013, *We Made It* five years later) and playing around America's Southeast. Half a century ago, however, Miss Annie had been in another family group, The Staples Jr Singers, along with her siblings, and it was after a copy of their debut, *When Do We Get Paid*, came to the attention of David Byrne that the story started to get interesting. When that was reissued on Luaka Bop

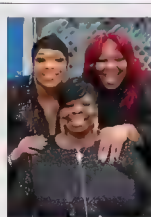
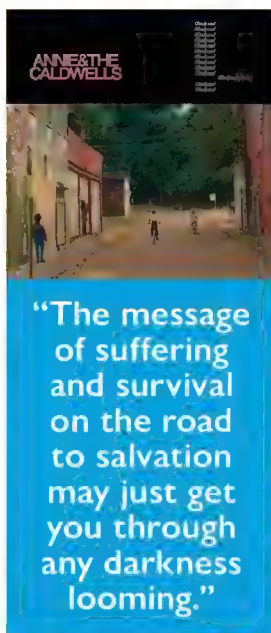
in 2022, Miss Annie raised the idea of doing something with her second family's material.

The six tracks here all appeared in different guises on the Ecco albums. Then, however, the goal was to take the gospel songs and give them an aspirational smoothness and an appeal beyond their obvious audience. Here, they are stripped back, letting the raw essence rise to the surface and evoking the strength of feeling that comes through their live performances. There's the swing of Sam Cooke at the Harlem Square Club, the search for ecstasy of the Family Stone at Woodstock, the power of Aretha Franklin at LA's New Temple Missionary Baptist Church and the fervour of Mahalia Jackson and Mavis Staples at 1969's Harlem Cultural Festival.

Making the Caldwell's comfortable had a lot to do with that: the label set up their studio in The Message Center, the West Point church where Willie Sr plays guitar on Sundays, and producer Ahmed Abdullahi Gallab – AKA Sinkane, who had been part of Luaka Bop's William Onyeabor tribute, *The Atomic Bomb Band* – has taken a hands-off approach. "The goal," he says, "was always to stay true to the feeling behind the music." Easier said than done: this is a group who purposely do not rehearse, relying instead on family intuition and the guidance of the Lord.

Perhaps making a traditional gospel album was not on Luaka Bop's agenda, but *Can't Lose My (Soul)* positions their new signings at the heart of the territory Tharpe occupied when she sang *Didn't It Rain* in Chorlton in May 1964, still holding strong to the traditions of call-and-response that were brought from Africa, but with added influences from the six decades since. *I Made It* is the Caldwell's *I Will Survive*, a disco number in which Miss Annie wards off Satan's bombs; *I'm Going To Rise* – which feels like a *Hot Buttered Soul* outtake – tells how not even death will keep Annie in the ground.

The world has changed, of course, and not everyone will seek reassurance in the Caldwell's beliefs. But the message of suffering and survival on the road to salvation may just get you through any darkness looming on the horizon... or simply get you dancing. Strange things still happen every day; just ask Sister Rosetta.



#### BACK STORY: HIGHER THINGS

● The blues' loss was gospel's victory, according to Miss Annie: "One day, I heard the girls rehearsing for a school talent contest. I thought: I gotta get these kids before the Devil get 'em. I didn't want that." She says most of their songs are written specifically about her life, but "after we sing, so many ladies come up and say, 'What you were saying was for me.'"







**Fright club: The Horrors** (from left) Jordan King, Rhys Webb, Faris Badwan and Amelia Kidd turn on the dark.

## The Horrors

★★★★★  
**Night Life**

FICTION. CD/DL/LP

Faris Badwan's nocturnal firebrands double down on goth credentials.

A CLASSIC English rock band, ever game for an aesthetic/conceptual reinvention, The Horrors' two-single dalliance in industrial noise almost sank them mid-Covid. So, a full eight

years on from fifth outing *V*, it's a trimmed line-up of Badwan (vocals) and Rhys Webb (bass) who here revert to flat-out goth-rock – perhaps cannily, with black-wearers back in vogue amid comebacks from Siouxsie Sioux and The Cure. Where latter albums presented a naggingly overcooked sound, producer Yves Rothman wisely marshalled *Night Life* in six weeks in LA, with new keyboard



player Amelia Kidd chipping in remotely from Glasgow. Within ominously booming coordinates often evoking

Hans Zimmer-style soundtracking, dark-pop miracles reliably happen, including Trial By Fire's Bauhaus-y, post-apocalyptic histrionics and Lotus Eater's borderline Euro-house melancholia – further Horrors classics for that 'Best Of' yet to come.

Andrew Perry



## Black Country, New Road

★★★★★  
**Forever Howlong**

NINJA TUNE. CD/DL/LP

London collective assume new form for album three. Days before the release of their second LP, 2022's *Ants From Up There*, Black Country, New Road's compelling frontman Isaac Wood announced he was leaving the band. Moving on from 2023's boldly transitional *Live At Bush Hall*, *Forever Howlong* shows the remaining six members settling into their striking new configuration. Violinist Georgia Ellery, keyboardist May Kershaw and bassist Tyler Hyde share out vocals and most of the songwriting, the album unfolding like a Slapp Happy musical about friends and other demons, or Roxy Music seizing control of a light opera society. Ellery's delicately non-platonic Besties sets the curious tone, its baroque knots and twists picked up in Kershaw's absurdist domestic fable *The Big Spin*, or the chamber-pop Coyote of Two Horses. Long-term fans might

feel like they are grappling with indie's own Grandfather's Axe paradox, but *Forever Howlong* is a remarkably unified – and gloriously intriguing – piece of work.

Victoria Segal

## Salif Keita

★★★★★

**So Kono**

NØ FORMATI. CD/DL/LP

Don't call it a comeback: post-retirement magic from Africa's Golden Voice.



Though he announced his retirement in 2018, few were convinced Keita had sung his last and he now appears to be being coaxed back into the spotlight. Two years ago, aged 73, he played the Kyotoponie festival in Japan; and it was in his hotel room afterwards that he – reluctantly, as he said his playing would be substandard – picked up his guitar and, with the help of ngoni (lute) and calabash percussion, recorded these nine tracks. At its best Keita's music had an extraordinary lushness; stripped of this, there's still a brittle, unavoidable magic in the air. His voice is magnificent, the songs simple and moving. He revisits Tassi (from 2012's *Talé*) and Laban (first heard on 2005's excellent *M'Bemba*), but the highlight may be his tribute to the guitarist Kanté Manfila, who guided Keita for more than three decades. Wonderful.

David Hutcheon

## Rhiannon Giddens & Justin Robinson

★★★★★

**What Did The Blackbird Say To The Crow**

NONESUCH. CD/DL/LP

Eighteen banjo and fiddle tunes from Giddens and a former bandmate.



On her last LP *American Railroad* (2024), Giddens collaborated with a multi-ethnic orchestra to tell the story of the black slaves and immigrants who built it. This too is a collaboration, its impetus the unacknowledged importance of the traditional black Southern string bands in American old-time folk. Less epic than *...Railroad*, there's just one other musician, Robinson – an original member of the Carolina Chocolate Drops, the all-black string band Giddens founded 20 years ago. The songs feature only two instruments, fiddle and banjo. They were recorded live outdoors, with added snippets of chirruping cicadas. Like its predecessor but more so, it's mostly instrumental, besides an occasional verse sung by Robinson (Hook & Line; Old Joe Clark) and dabs of backing vocals from Giddens (Joe Henry). A bit of a pity given her great voice. An album for banjo/fiddle fans and music history buffs.

Sylvie Simmons

## Butler, Blake & Grant

★★★★★

**Butler, Blake & Grant**

355. CD/DL/LP

Ex-Suede guitarist Bernard Butler, Teenage Fanclub's Norman Blake and Love & Money's James Grant mellifluously join forces.



After Scottish gig promoter Douglas Macintyre suggested Butler, Blake & Grant could be 'a thing', some low-key acoustic shows hastened this striking country, folk and pop debut tracked at Blake's Clydeside home and mixed at Butler's London studio. There's an egalitarian 'you sing mine, I'll sing yours' vibe reminiscent of late-'90s BBC TV show Songwriters' Circle, with stand-outs such as Blake's timeless-sounding, Dillard & Clark-esque Writing's On The Wall and Grant's succinct Byrdsian gem One And One Is Two immediate and invigorating. Lead guitar aces both, Grant and Butler mostly rein in chops in service of the songs, but get excited towards the end of Bring An End, wherein Butler, Blake & Grant could be Crosby, Nash & Young. What's certainly clear is that this spin-the-bottle project has legs, its relaxed meeting of minds a mellifluous triple-threat.

James McNair

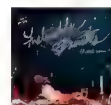
## Japanese Breakfast

★★★★★

**For Melancholy Brunettes (And Sad Women)**

DEAD OCEANS. CD/DL/LP

Sonically ambitious fourth from South Korean singer/author.



Following her bestselling 2021 memoir *Crying In H Mart* (tackling the death of her mother, which sparked an exploration of her Korean identity), Michelle Zauner has upped her game, recording at Sound City Studios in LA, with Blake Mills (Feist, Laura Marling) in the producer's chair. The result veers between artful '90s slacker rock (Honey Water) and beautifully ornate balladry in the vein of the glittering harp- and recorder-adorned *Here Is Someone and Orlando In Love*, which holds some of the epic sweep of *Poses*-era Rufus Wainwright. Even Jeff Bridges pops up, sounding like a weathered Michael McDonald on *Men In Bars*, wherein he and Zauner enact an infidelity narrative with a murderous end. Throughout, there's a newfound sophistication evident, and repeated plays only reveal more layers of melody and sonic nuance.

Tom Doyle

## Destroyer

★★★★★

**Dan's Boogie**

MERGE. CD/DL/LP

Vancouver's man of mystery cuts an existential rug.



Of Love, a typically lush, cryptic song on Destroyer's excellent 14th album. While it's a line in keeping with Bejar's songwriting mission – a treasure hunt for meaning in a world overloaded with symbols and significance – *Dan's Boogie* has a lightness absent from its superbly dread-soaked predecessor, 2022's *Labyrinthitis*. His concerns remain heavy but the dank paranoia is supplanted by visionary rapture – especially on *Hydroplaning Off The Edge Of The World*, or *Travel Light's* Laura Nyro vamp. Sun Meet Snow sounds like Flaming Lips in guided meditation with Popol Vuh, while there's a New Age private-press shimmer to *Cataract Time*, even as Bejar declares "every day we give up time/We pour the drink into a vast glass". *Dan's Boogie* remains fascinatingly obscure in places, but these songs are full of buried gold.

Victoria Segal



# Queen of cups

South London's cosmic neo-soul-searcher keeps up the blue sky thinking on second album. By Victoria Segal.

## Greentea Peng

★★★★★

### Tell Dem It's Sunny

AWAL. CD/DL/LP

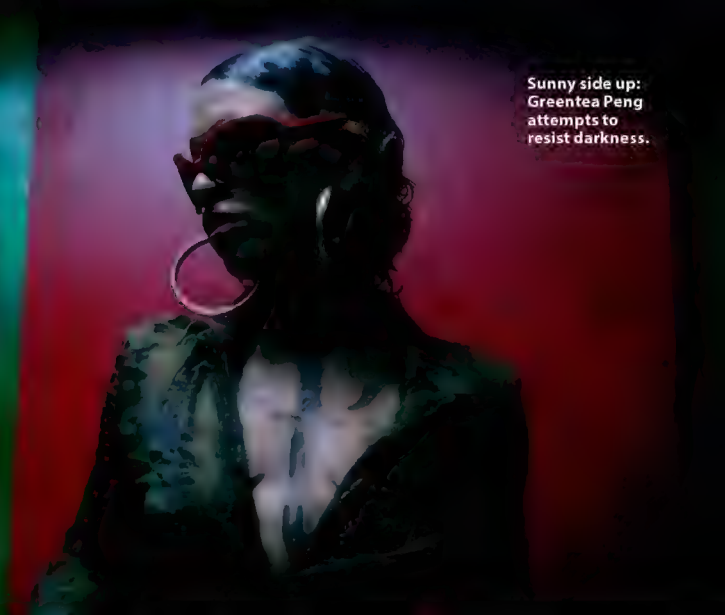
BREEZILY DITCHING that well-established creative principle "show, don't tell," Greentea Peng outlined exactly what she was setting out to do with her music on her ambitious 2021 debut *Man Made*. "This sound," the south London-born singer-songwriter declared, "is physical... metaphysical and mystical," before defining it as "sensual," "alchemical" and "like medicine". She ended with an instruction: "now open wide and let it in."

If it seemed like a lot to absorb, Greentea Peng – the stage name adopted by Aria Wells – happily delivered on her claims, merging psychedelic soul, woozy trip-hop and Erykah Badu-influenced R&B into broad-spectrum beats, a holistic alternative therapy groove designed to work against tough times. *Tell Dem It's Sunny* has a similarly medicinal quality, but Wells's second album doesn't work in a puff of healing smoke or as a few drops under the tongue: it's a bitterer, sharper-edged kind of pill to swallow. Even *Glory*, where Wells sings the album's title over a treacherous, heat-stroked Balearic



groove, sounds like it's just clinging on to the sunny side, aware of incoming clouds of ambient smog. "I'm fucking exhausted," she says after the kaleidoscope-eyes intro of *One Foot*, "messed up, distorted."

Wells might still immerse herself in the trippily spiritual side of life, but these songs are bolted down into the real world, a space shared with her former collaborators Neneh Cherry and Mike Skinner. Over the buzzy third-rail beats of *TARDIS* (Hardest), she details her journey to her collaborator Earbuds' studio – "from West Ham to Norwood" – putting herself firmly in the here and now as she describes her commitment to her work, her attempts to resist darkness. "I'm shaking through my pen and into page," she drawls, her steady delivery masking the urgency of her words, "I think I found a way to shape my rage."



Sunny side up: Greentea Peng attempts to resist darkness.

On every song, there's detail that destabilises and derails: the *Ghost Town* groan underneath the downbeat *My Neck*, for example, a collaboration with the Brixton musician Wu-Lu; the *Sour Times* thrum of *Green*, or the '90s squat-aggro guitar on *Create And Destroy*. Wells's Amy Winehouse smoke-ring of a voice, meanwhile, is right in the room but always slightly off to the side, finding the subtleties even in comparatively straight-ahead break-up song *Stones Thrown*.

"I am not who I was yesterday," Wells sings on *I AM* (Reborn), "don't act like you know me." *Tell Dem It's Sunny* feels like the work of an artist in motion, brain whirring even when she appears serene. This time, this sound pitches harder and faster between the troubled and the transcendent, the mystical and the physical, but Greentea Peng is still dispensing powerful medicine.

## Peter Holsapple

★★★★★

### The Face Of 68

LABEL 51 RECORDINGS. CD/DL/LP

The dB's' master craftsman's spirited rock of ages.



Rattling through some of the many spines in his record collection

on *That Kind Of Guy*, Peter Holsapple sings: "I got *A Love Supreme*, I got *a Soft Machine*, I got *The Dave Clark Five*, I got *Slade Alive!*" An expert listener, Holsapple's childhood passion for Big Star and British Invasion pop prepared him well for a free-wheeling career – as a dB, a solo artist and a sideman for R.E.M. and Hootie & The Blowfish. His latest adds an unlikely cock-rock strut to the tricks he learned from the first *Move* LP as he expertly repurposes time-served sounds to make a smart self-portrait. Having turned 68 in February (hence the album title) Holsapple considers ageing (High Horse) and fallen comrades (Sad About Sam), but finds consolation in autumn-toned love (*She And Me*). *Lovers of Teenage Fanclub*, XTC and

heavyweight gatefold sleeves will appreciate it hugely.

Jim Wirth

## Dean Wareham

★★★★★

### That's The Price Of Loving Me

CARPARK. CD/DL/LP

Former *Galaxie 500* frontman reunited with production guru Kramer. Backing includes wife Britta Phillips.



The last Wareham solo album was 2021's *I Have Nothing To Say To The Mayor*

Of LA, the title's ironic self-importance suggesting Leonard Cohen circa *First We Take Manhattan*. With Wareham's voice now deeper than the compellingly quasi-Kermit tones he unveiled with *Galaxie 500*, the Cohen mood is even stronger. You Were The Ones I Had To Betray has a melody so strong it feels like you've heard it before. The lyrics have love's intimacies and infelicities blurring into the kind of deception you might find in some distant and dangerous nation state. The album is produced by Kramer

who brought such sumptuous gauziness to *Galaxie 500*. There's less reverb this time, but it all sounds great, befitting a set of excellent songs that range from the *Galaxie*-ish *New World Julie* to the "parallel inlays" and "polymer pearl" of the madrigal-sweet *We're Not Finished Yet*, an ode to a guitar.

Roy Wilkinson

## Babe Rainbow

★★★★★

### Slipper Imp And Shakaerator

PIDOOM. CD/DL/LP

Sun-saturated ruminations from the Byron Bay friends of King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard.



While a 'slipper imp' is conceptual, shakaerators are agricultural machines used to turn over soil. The opening cut of east coast Australians Babe Rainbow's sixth studio album has a voiceover "feeding microbes" with the device. The track, *What Is Ashwagandha*, references a plant with stress-reducing

properties. And, with its gentle locked grooves and Milton Nascimento-esque arrangements, this is a tension-free zone. While *Babe Rainbow* is a Peter Blake painting also saluted by *The House Of Love* and Paul Weller, this particularly Australian surf-psychedelia is rooted in what fellow New South Wales band Tamam Shud perfected in the late 1960s. King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard's Stu Mackenzie appears (*Slipper Imp...* is on the Lizard's label), as does Parisian singer-songwriter Camille Jansen. Despite the guests, though, this hazy contemplation of bliss is wholly hermetic.

Kieron Tyler

## Tom Hickox

★★★★★

### The Orchestra Of Stories

FAMILY TREE. CD/DL/LP

Brit's third album title does exactly what it says on the tin. Since his 2014 debut *War, Peace And Diplomacy*, the son of classical conductor Richard Sidney Hickox has made orchestration and storytelling his bedrock, brought to life in

a sumptuous, quavery baritone. Since 2017's *Monsters In The Deep*, he's become a father, and lost his mother and stepfather. Such personal highs and lows are perhaps what's hidden inside these *Play For Today* miniatures; dignified sagas fuelled by vulnerability and failure, starting with *The Clairvoyant's* widower broken by a fraudulent psychic. Hickox breaks the third wall with occasional reality checks, including the Trump-skewering *Game Show* (the addition of a sampled newsreader feels like a misstep) and *The Port Quin Fishing Disaster's* allegory of refugees. For more illuminating, timeless tales, head for *The Shoemaker* and *Man On The High Road* – the latter the closest Hickox gets to role model Scott Walker's shivery grandeur.

Martin Aston





Feeling good: Lucy Dacus is more than a contender now.

## Lucy Dacus

★★★★★

### Forever Is A Feeling

POLYDOR. CD/DL/LP/MC

Fourth solo album from a third of Boygenius.

WITH HER Grammy and Brit-festooned side-project Boygenius on possibly permanent hold, Lucy Dacus has returned to her day job. Last time out, for all her fierce, left-leaning activism, 2021's *Home Video* embraced her Virginian childhood. This time around she's very much in the present. *Forever Is A Feeling* is layered, lush and contemplative, so Dacus keeps her anger under the radar, even when she's "knocking down your door" on the gorgeous closer *Lost Time*. She tips her hat to Americana, alt-folk and Fiona Apple-esque introspection, while Hozier submits a sterling cameo on *Bullseye* and her Boygenius bandmates offer scattered backing vocals throughout. She pushes boundaries too, whether

deploying soaring strings on *Ankles* ("pull me by the ankles to the edge of the bed," indeed), space-age plinking on the title track, distorted slow grunge on *Talk* or woozy piano on *Limerence*, a controlled song about uncontrolled desire. She's more than a contender now.

John Aizlewood



## Nell Smith

★★★★★

Anxious

BELLA UNION. CD/DL/LP

Posthumous release from teenage Flaming Lips protégé.



Leeds-born, Canada-raised Nell Smith was just 14 when she collaborated

with The Flaming Lips on the 2021 Nick Cave tribute, *Where The Viaduct Looms*. And she was just 17 when she died in a car crash last October. Recorded during her sole burst of studio activity in 2023, Smith's debut album (helmed by Brighton-based siblings Jack and Lily Wolter, AKA labelmates Penelope Isles) was ready for release before she passed, and her family have consented to its release. The results are as dreamy and swirling as *Clouds Taste Metallic*-era Flaming Lips, with Smith's unworldly vocals floating over the top. What the future would have held can never be known, but if the gently insistent *Daisy Fields*, the spartan *Bubba* and the lo-fi *Boy In A Bubble* (the tale of Smith's relationship with Flaming Lips) are reliable yardsticks, it might have been special.

John Aizlewood

## Perfume Genius

★★★★★

Glory

MATADOR. CD/DL/LP

Atmospheric seventh album takes surprising dips and turns.

Sometimes, Perfume Genius/Mike Hadreas has suffered from a wilful eclecticism that has made him tough to follow. On *Glory*, there's more cohesion, mainly due to the fact that he fleshed out the arrangements in a band set-up. It's *A Mirror* comes over like R.E.M., produced by Stephen Malkmus, while the brilliant, twisty *No Front Teeth* starts off like a Welch/Rawlings country ballad, before unexpectedly whipping up a Who-like storm, with Aldous Harding providing an aching, angelic dropdown chorus en route. Elsewhere, dreamily strummed infatuation ballad *Full On* has Hadreas unleashing his inner Art Garfunkel in a tale involving the object of his affections being involved in some kind of football injury (he even manages to wring emotion out of the line, "I saw every quarterback crying"). Over its 11 tracks, it draws the listener fully into its dreamworld.

Tom Doyle



James McNair

extended peak in this epic, non-stop rebirth party.

David Fricke

## Miki Berenyi Trio

★★★★★

Tripla

BELLA UNION. CD/DL/LP

Lush songsmith's sublimely constructed feminist alt-pop.



After Lush's 2015-16 reunion brought closure rather than ongoing

activation, their once co-frontwoman formed Piroshka with super-sub drummer Justin Welch, plus her partner Kevin 'Moose' McKillop (guitar), and Modern English's Mick Conroy (bass). When Welch and Conroy moved on, a hastily constituted eponymous three-piece, featuring McKillop and bassist Oliver Cherer (concurrently in Aircooled), gigged with a drum machine to promote Berenyi's excellent memoir, *Fingers Crossed*. A few years on, MB3 here make their long-playing debut, with all the three-referencing iconography of a Jack White project. The beatbox and spacious synth/guitar textures lend *Tripla* (the Hungarian title nods to her father's native tongue) greater sophistication than any regurgitated 'shoegaze', instead evoking mid-'80s New Order's retro-futurist pop, where elegant tunes and crisp tempos provide a stately platform for Berenyi's forthright messaging on male politicians' reckless

eco-destruction (8th Deadly Sin), social media misogyny (Gango) and her own post-menopausal depression (Vertigo). On all fronts, a nourishing listen.

Andrew Perry

## The Darkness

★★★★★

Dreams On Toast

COOKING VINYL. CD/DL/LP

Lowestoft's hard (and soft) rock titans return.



"Marshall stack, double Jack – big party!" sings Justin Hawkins, formalising one conduit to mayhem. Eight albums in, The Darkness are still entertaining shorthand for hard rock's dafter terrain, still dangerously close to being The Barron Knights in spandex. It was somewhat surprising, then, when their recent one-shot video for non-sense choogle *I Hate Myself* proved so powerful, Hawkins unrecognisably and intriguingly made up as an ageing, chain smoking, self-loathing rocker mourning lost love. From the ELO-meets-Queen-like *The Longest Kiss* to silly acoustic getaway *Weekend In Rome*, to Queen-meets-erm... Queen power ballad *Don't Need Sunshine*, *Dreams On Toast*'s music is much less nuanced and thought-provoking – but that's no slur. Though The Darkness's hard-rock has trace elements of end-of-pier show in Blackpool, their pomp and preposterousness remain a tonic.

## Swami John Reis

★★★★★

Time To Let You Down

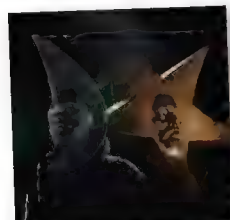
SWAMI. DL/LP

Greaser punk guru, more reliable than he claims.



"Celebrating 55 years in the music business," claims the press release accompanying this latest dispatch from The Artist Formerly Known As Speedo, which may be pushing it a bit. Nevertheless, John Reis's hot streak now runs for 36 years and encompasses *Drive Like Jehu*, *Pitchfork*, *Hot Snakes*, *Back Off Cupids*, *Sultans*, *Night Marchers* and *Plosivs*, as well as *Rocket From The Crypt*. Recent solo albums have stuck close to the Rocket formula, minus the horns, and *Time To Let You Down* – his third in four years – is pleasingly no exception. To wit: 11 songs in 28 minutes, gnarly sentiments (ie, *Because I Stink*) and that familiar aesthetic of hardcore punks gatecrashing a sock hop. Fed To The Dogs gets fractionally closer to metal than usual, and there's a hint more synth humming under the massed guitar heft. But mostly this is the best kind of business as usual: 11 perfect nuggets of aggro bubblegum, smashed out with a nonchalance that belies their considerable craft.

John Mulvey



## Motorpsycho

★★★★★

Motorpsycho

DET NORDENFJELDSKE GRAMMOFONSELSKAB. DL/LP

Latest double-LP voyage by Norway's astro travellers.

It only took 34 years. Motorpsycho have finally named an album, their 24th, after themselves, reflecting a reset for the founding core of guitarist Hans Magnus Ryan and singer-bassist Bent Sæther, now trimmed to a zealously multi-tracking duo with orbiting drummers and textural-cameo guests. The effect is a sprawling unity of hard-psych marathons with wrecking-ball swing – the motorik entrance *Lucifer*, *Bringer Of Light*, the dawn-light charge of guitars and vocal chrome in *Balthazaar* – bridged with jangling dynamite (*Core Memory Corrupt*) and duelling axes power-blues fun with Dungen's *Reine Fiske* (*The Comeback*). There is knife-edged solace in *Laird Of Heimly* and *Bed Of Roses*, evoking the cello-lined tensions on Cream's *Wheels Off Fire*, while at 21 minutes, *Neotzar* (*The Second Coming*) is a whispaw momentum with all of those extremes – an



# Paradise regained

Bluegrass at its most refined yet existential, as old firm stick and twist for seventh studio outing. By Mark Cooper.

## Alison Krauss & Union Station

★★★★★

Arcadia

DOWN THE ROAD. CD/DL/LP

WHILE SHE'S been busy with her solo career and her opposites-attract collaboration with Robert Plant, Krauss hasn't made an album with her colleagues Union Station in 14 years. Yet despite the arrival of IIIrd Tyme Out's Russell Moore as Alison's new lead vocal foil, there's much that's reassuringly familiar about *Arcadia*. As ever, the sonic palette is richly clean, the harmonies stacked, and Jerry Douglas's dobro an empathetic, keening presence in constant dialogue with the singers, now the dominant solo instrument in the ensemble. Krauss and the band have been ploughing this furrow since their *Two Highways* debut back in 1989, operating intermittently alongside Krauss's largely more mainstream solo career and weathering together the early 2000s when O Brother, Where Art Thou? and Cold Mountain briefly turned bluegrass into a pop phenomenon.

She may have sold 12 million albums, but fame has never turned Krauss's head – she's stuck with the musicians and songwriters she



Super 'grass: (from left) Jerry Douglas, Alison Krauss, Ron Block, Russell Moore and Barry Bales evoke the essential American soul.



encountered as a teenage prodigy on the old-time festival circuit, distilling those roots into a chamber art form while casting herself as a woman of constant sorrow for the 21st century. When she's with Union Station she's where she seems most at ease, part of a traditional ensemble in what began as a male-dominated form – her plaintive, crystalline soprano alternating songs with Moore's high lonesome tenor which evokes what D.H. Lawrence memorably called “the essential American soul... hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer.”

Krauss has talked of how she channels the past when she sings, drawing on “the good old days when times were bad”. Yet many of the songs she picks here – the opening Looks Like The End Of The Road or One Ray Of Shine – relocate perennial bluegrass themes of loss and travail to the present in contemporary confes-

sions of alienation and paths not taken. “In my life who would believe/The never ending lonely inside of me...” she asks on Robert Castleman and former band member Dan Tyminski's The Wrong Way, her voice as poignant and fragile as any isolated settler a long way from home. If Krauss soothes and sorrows in her clear-eyed soprano, Moore delivers impassioned and fatalistic folk narratives like Cordelia's Dad's arrangement of the traditional Granite Mills, a grim account of the 1874 Fall River fire where 23 women and children died on the sixth floor of a cotton textile mill, before getting a tad frisky on J.D. McPherson's rousing North Side Gal. Occasionally they swap roles but, overall, Moore anchors the album in a rough-hewn past, while Krauss concludes the album pointing forwards in Jeremy Lister's closing There's A Light Up Ahead, assuring us that “she'll move along, can't keep on looking backwards.”

## Craig Finn

★★★★★

Always Been

TAMARAC/THIRTY TIGERS. CD/DL/LP

Hold Steady leader's sixth solo outing, with The War On Drugs backing.



When the wordsmith behind such lyrics-heavy gems as THS's *Boys And Girls* In America says that he's just penned his most narratively focused LP, you know you're in for a hefty helping of story-songcraft. In brief, *Always Been* charts the fall and redemption of a clergyman lacking in faith, but such is the novelistic depth of Finn's fiction that there's ample room for familiar blue-collar tropes (fiscal strife, domestic tension, drinking, upping sticks to start over), plus lashings of trademark Catholic guilt. What separates this album from the 14 he's made before is the involvement of Adam Granduciel, who produces luminously, plays guitars, synths and more, and enlists his bandmates for much of the remaining instrumentation – although, curiously, the shadow vocal on the rousing Springsteenian Postcards was

apparently supplied by stadium-filling North Shields troubadour Sam Fender. An auspicious moment, then, to check back in on the New York yarn-spinner's own plot development.

Andrew Perry

## Julien Baker & Torres

★★★★★

Send A Prayer My Way

MATADOR. CD/DL/LP

First album from a third of Boygenius plus Mackenzie Scott.



Both Julien Baker and Mackenzie Scott, AKA Torres, had reasonably successful solo careers before they first played together in 2016, before Baker took a turn into Boygenius. Solo, both women specialised in defiant introspection, with a vaguely country tinge. Together they've upped the country count to offer a gentle, spartan album overflowing with straight-forward songs and harmony vocals, which evoke Emmylou Harris as much as Margo Price. The sweetness

and seeming lack of cutting edge mask something darker. Those looking for the new generation of outlaw country which the union promised might peruse the lyrics, where The Only Marble I've Got Left finds them sweetly crooning about being “stoned off my gourd”, being horizontal and drunk on Bottom Of A Bottle and Dirt, while Tuesday reveals the perils of falling in love with a girl called Tuesday. Sweet but barbed.

John Aizlewood

## Mumford & Sons

Rushmere

★★★★★

ISLAND. CD/DL/LP

Fifth album but their first since 2018, and their first as a trio.



With 2018's *Delta* being their third consecutive US chart-topper, Mumford & Sons seemed to have cemented their top-table place. Then, they imploded. Winston Marshall, founder band member, and son of a GB News founder, left after endorsing dubious political

commentators and leader Marcus Mumford fled the fallout to make an uncompromising solo album. As befits an album named after the Wimbledon pond where things began, they've gone back to business with a back to basics set. Without Marshall, they're less overtly folk-based and on the standout Caroline, they're as rewarding as David Gray at his most up-tempo, while Madison Cunningham brings a feminine touch to Blood On The Page. Other strengths remain, not least Mumford's shiversome voice and their way with an earworm, be it the hushed centrepiece Where It Belongs or the more raucous title track.

John Aizlewood

## Brown Horse

★★★★★

All The Right Weaknesses

LOOSE. CD/DL/LP

Norwich country rockers' second album concentrates on the rock.

Some bands arrive fully formed, some grow into their skin, and it's the latter case with Brown Horse. A six-piece

collective – they all write, sing and swap instruments – they've spent months on the road around festivals and Europe following the release of debut album *Reservoir* early in 2024. Since then, their quietly grungy country rock has opened up, *All The Right Weaknesses* riding a deep and easy inner groove where the debut sometimes hesitated to cut loose, landing on a loose-limbed Waterboys-meets-Crazy Horse energy. Like the band members who juggle 'real' life with the musical dream, the songs too seem caught in a liminal space, where protagonists are on the outside looking through windows or never quite able to find a personal resolution. Which is fine, because when the questions sound this good, who needs all the answers?

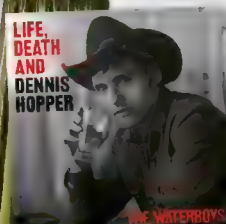
Andy Fyfe







**Bed-in fellows:** The Waterboys get conceptual with ...Dennis Hopper.



Waterboys' music (see *And A Bang On The Ear*) to fully emerge, then here he runs riot with it. The result sounds like a fast-moving mixtape, with the eclecticism of Frank Zappa's '68 audio collage *We're Only In It For The Money*.

Comprising songs (some with key guest appearances), instrumentals, a fake movie trailer (for 'Freaks On Wheels': "Saddle up your hog, man, and get loaded") and Scott playing the part of an ageing hippy recalling his memories of the Monterey Pop Festival, it's quite a trip.

Opener *Kansas* throws the first curveball, in that it's sung by Steve Earle, as the youthful Hopper pining to leave his home state. Then we quickly sweep through a first half that chronologically follows Hopper's story and manages to encompass dreamy exotica in *Brooke/1712 North Crescent Heights*, retro futuristic bossa nova in *Andy (A Guy Like You)* and distinct Buffalo Springfield vibes with *The Tourist*.

None other than Bruce Springsteen pops up over the circular, trancey groove of *Ten Years Gone*, providing a husky spoken-word cameo celebrating Hopper in his lost decade post-*The Last Movie* ("Somewhere out there beyond the limits, man, there's a story being told"). Later, in piano ballad *Letter From An Unknown Girlfriend*, Fiona Apple takes the lead vocal for a song of love and hate that defiantly addresses domestic violence.

It doesn't all work: *Freakout At The Mud Palace* sounds like a 1980s Euro house DJ trying to rock out, and Frank (Let's Fuck) has Scott, casting himself in Hopper's *Blue Velvet* role as the psychopathic Frank Booth, repeatedly howling the bracketed part of its title over a grinding groove. But otherwise the hit rate is high, and Mike Scott is clearly having fun cutting himself free from The Waterboys' past, and playing fast and loose — much like the mercurial subject of this album.

# Eye of the storm

Mike Scott celebrates the wild at heart countercultural figure.  
By Tom Doyle.

## The Waterboys

★★★★★

*Life, Death And Dennis Hopper*

SUN. CD/DL/LP

SOME YEARS ago Mike Scott chanced upon an exhibition of the '60s photo art of Dennis Hopper, best known as the radical, freewheeling actor/director. Seeing the era through Hopper's eyes moved Scott to investigate the former's story further and increasingly view

Hopper (who died from prostate cancer aged 74 in 2010) as a cultural giant, but also to feel a growing appreciation for a man who'd lost his mind in the process of making 1971's baffling rogue stuntman flop *The Last Movie*.

Scott could relate to the latter, having as he admits, "hit the rails making *Fisherman's Blues*" in Ireland in the '80s. Inspired, he wrote the simply named pop-art rocker Dennis Hopper (which appears here in reprised form as closer *Aftermath*) for The Waterboys' 2020 album, *Good Luck, Seeker*. Then, over four years, he spun the star's tale into this 25-track-long conceptual album.

If recent years have seen Scott move further away from his image as an apparently solemn spiritual seeker, allowing the humour in The

## Throwing Muses

★★★★★

*Moonlight Concessions*

FIRE. CD/DL/LP

First album of Throwing Muses art-rock intensity since 2020.



Here Throwing Muses fulcrum Kristin Hersh presides over churning, haunted guitar

music, full of igneous emotional impact. You could say the same of the Muses' debut, released nigh 40 years ago, but there are differences also. The key non-vocal instruments this time are Pete Harvey's cello and Hersh's acoustic guitar, the latter customised with foam and tape to increase its chugging percussiveness. On *Summer Of Love* the words rasp out like searing epiphanies: "Finally life, finally life as it should have been." Albatross is so fierce it's tiring, but exhilaratingly so. As often with Throwing Muses, the perspective isn't always Hersh's own. The album was written in California and on the Gulf Of Mexico, drawing on conversations with strangers. The title comes from a food concession at Moonlight Beach in San Diego. We'll

Annie Atlasman

maybe never know how good Throwing Muses would be serving burritos, but they provide music of extraordinary potency.

Roy Wilkinson

## Beirut

★★★★★

*A Study Of Losses*

POMPEII. CD/DL/LP

Melancholic and beautiful collaboration with Swedish circus company.



While the undulating synth chords of opener *Disappearances And Losses* suggest that Beirut's Zac Condon might have packed up his flugelhorn and embraced more modern textures, the ensuing sumptuous weave of harpsichord, mandolin, organ and strings finds him by and large still rooted in the old country signifiers of his previous six albums. Condon's contribution to Swedish circus company Kompani Giraff's production of the same name, itself based on An Inventory Of Losses by German author Judith Schalansky, *A Study Of Losses*' deep dive into grief and

impermanence indulges Condon's already melancholic disposition for what might be his most beautiful record to date, particularly on the instrumental numbers. The dusty drum machine clicks on Garbo's Face and Ghost Town's Gregorian synth-pop, meanwhile, show he can still tinker with the formula when required.

Chris Catchpole

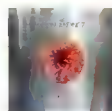
## The Moonlandingz

★★★★★

*No Rocket Required*

TRANSGRESSIVE. CD/DL/LP

Lias Saudi's electronic miscreants get dirty again.



The Moonlandingz' debut, 2017's *Interplanetary Class Classics*, teamed Fat White Family prime movers Saudi and Saul Adamczewski with Sheffield synth masters Dean Honer and Adrian Flanagan for an electro-glam romp, as a pseudo-fictionalised Spiders From Mars fronted by Saudi's 'Johnny Rocket'. Though Saudi's stock has since risen via authoring a

book and further diversifying with hi-NRG outfit Decius, he's struggling to match his incendiary on-stage presence after a terminal severance with Adamczewski last year. Indeed, without ICC's Mick Ronson aboard, *No Rocket Required* leans more towards ironised easy listening (*All Out Of Pop*) and '80s disco (*The Sign Of A Man*), topped with compulsively gut-churning lyrics behind titles like *The Insects Have Been Shat On*. Highlights include Roustabout's edgy duet with Nadine Shah and *Stink Foot*'s breezy ABBA-esque swish, voiced by Jessica Winter. Truthfully, a little more Rocket would've been ideal.

Andrew Perry

## Mekons

★★★★★

*Horror*

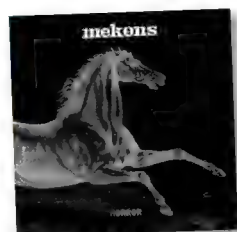
FIRE. CD/DL/LP

Apocalypse now and then: post-punk ensemble reckon with the past.

Recording their latest album in Valencia, the Mekons were struck by Spain's Pact Of Forgetting, the unspoken agreement by politicians to overlook Franco-era atrocities and move on. On *Joe*

Strummer skank *You're Not Singing Anymore*, they focus on nations "still sitting on secrets", with *Horror* the Leeds-Chicago collective's attempt to air historic dirty laundry. The punky reggae of *The Western Design* spotlights brutish British colonialism, the aggro-R.E.M. Mudcrablers shows how desperate Irish famine victims jumping ships to Wales were treated as "ballast, cargo, contraband" while *War Economy* nods to the band's radical art college pals the Gang Of Four. If the Meeks of the late-'70s were a well-intentioned shambles, *Horror* feels considered; Sally Timms' space-whispering leavens founder members Jon Langford and Tom Greenhalgh's spiky agit-pop, but their soft-bodied quality persists. Some ugly truths here, but also a quiet testament to comradeship.

Jim Wirth





## Rizwan-Muazzam Qawwali

★★★★★

At The Feet Of The Beloved

REAL WORLD. CD/DL/LP

Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's nephews pull out all the stops.



It has been more than 20 years since we had an album by Pakistan's sufi princes,

the qawwali party that looked set to wear the crown their uncle wore until his death, and the pace set by the opening pair of songs (of four, all around 13 minutes) suggests they are making up for lost time. No slow introductions, no warming up the musicians, just wham, bam, straight into screaming passion, vocals that teeter on the verge of losing control completely and barely controlled call-and-response choruses, backed by rhythm tracks that would hardly be out of place on a compilation of the wildest rockabilly ever recorded. This is devotional music with all restraint banished to the wilderness, and lyrics such as "I have dyed my heart in the beloved's hue" demonstrating the intensity of the wailing souls' love. Dive in.

David Hucheson

## Tobacco City

★★★★★

Horses

SCISSOR TAIL. DL/LP

Burritos redux! The golden age of country-rock, revisited.



Chicago's Tobacco City certainly aren't the first band to try and reconnect with

the original wave of Cosmic Country – to cosplay as Gram and Emmylou in Western shirts. Fair play, though: as this second album proves, they're fantastically good at it. *Horses* builds on the tentative success of 2022's *Tobacco City, USA*, so that the honky-tonk sway, bittersweet boy-girl harmonies and faintly lysergic trim are all still there, but the playing is richer, less indie, and – critical, this – the songs are

David Sheppard



Devotional rescue: Rizwan-Muazzam Qawwali let go.

excellent. Mr Wine is an instant keeper, with nice Return Of The Grievous Angel vibes and a guitar solo that gently nudges affairs into freakier Canned Heat territory. There's a touch of R.E.M. in the mix, too, with Chris Coleslaw channelling Stipe circa Wendell Gee on Autumn. And full marks for closing the springy Buffalo with an a cappella snatch of Home On The Range that miraculously sounds more heartfelt than arch. Pony up!

John Mulvey

## Michael Grigoni And Pan-American

★★★★★

New World, Lonely Ride

KRANKY. CD/DL/LP

Ambient beauty meets desolate Americana in duo's debut collaboration.



North Carolina-based lap steel and dobro maestro Michael Grigoni is known for

recasting country-folk textures as things of meditative tenderness, while Pan-American's Mark Nelson, co-founder of Virginian post-rock progenitors Labradford, is a veteran of contemplative instrumental music-making. Here, Grigoni's arsenal melts into Nelson's reverberant baritone electric guitar and tremulous synths to take a wordless emotional audit of the contemporary US, a place, on this evidence, whose endless horizons come etched with deep melancholy. While the title track inhabits Ry Cooder's Paris, Texas soundtrack terrain and the lonesome plangency of Dream Of Someone nods to Angelo Badalamenti's David Lynch scores, much here has its own, hazily dreamlike quality, not least the pensive, glinting *Mirage/Afternoon* and the iridescent *Silver Streams*. The closing Baritone Borderlands, meanwhile, recalls Eno's *Discreet Music*, its aching ambient drift poignantly suspended, like much here, between wistfulness and redemption.

## Ed Kuepper & Jim White

★★★★★

After The Flood

12XU. CD/DL/LP

Erstwhile Saint and Dirty Three drummer grind through Kuepper's back pages.



For 50 years Ed Kuepper has been crashing perceptions of what Australian rock'n'roll can

be, first as a Saint, then a Laughing Clown and, finally, under his own name. Likewise, as drummer with Dirty Three, Jim White has been defying musical convention with equal disregard, albeit for 'only' 30 years. Both came to this collaboration to reinterpret songs from Kuepper's catalogue with a freewheeling, near-as-dammit improv approach, which gelled into these eight tracks during sporadic, Covid-disrupted touring. The best respondents to their discordant guitar and pummelling rhythm are The Saints' *Swing For The Crime*, the oldest song here, and *Collapse Board* from an early-'80s Laughing Clowns EP, but 2015 solo track *The Ruins* runs them close. Tribal, jazzy, at times doom-laden, *After The Flood* is undoubtedly the darkest moment in Kuepper's long and storied career.

Andy Frye

## Mrs. Henry

★★★★★

Keep On Rising: A 21st Century Rock Opera

BLIND OWL. CD/DL/LP

A night at the rock opera with all of the trimmings.



No guts, no glory: Mrs. Henry – a San Diego band founded by singer-guitarist

Daniel Cervantes and named after a Dylan song on *The Basement Tapes* – grind that maxim into every '70s glam-riffing and '80s power-chorus minute of *Keep On Rising*, a three-act fable in 38 tracks about a rock'n'roll kid determined to make it at any price. It's an age-old tale, but the ride is the right kind of relentless with sharply written anthems (*We Are A Rock N Roll Band*; *Bye, Bye, Baby*) in an arena-church production that embraces improbable dreams: Guns N' Roses blowing up *The Wall*; Queen flaunting their vocal glaze over *Use Your Illusion* (both of 'em). The lavishly packaged deluxe edition is a Ring Cycle in itself, while the gist of this brash undertaking is tight enough to fit in your fist. "Raise hell and raise your head," Cervantes declares on *We're Gonna Win*. *Keep On Rising* does it without apology, in excelsis.

David Fricke

## JAZZ

BY ANDY COWAN



## Gregory Uhlmann, Josh Johnson, & Sam Wilkes

★★★★★

Uhlmann Johnson Wilkes

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM. CD/DL/LP

LA players unite for jazzy take on electro-acoustic chamber music.

Bringing together three envelope-pushers from Los Angeles' vibrant jazz scene, this was never going to be a straight-ahead listen. So it proves. From stuttering, stop-start opener *Marvis* (first featured on Johnson's *Unusual Object*) to the harmonic bass and slowly unfurling melody of *Unsure* (reprise from Wilkes's *Live On The Green*) to Johnson's transcendent alto-saxophone on *Arpy*, it plays to their chameleonic reputations. While the lack of percussion focuses ears on the timbre of Uhlmann's fingerpicked electric guitar, Wilkes's fragile bass and Johnson's treated horn there's familiar comfort in a sweeping, transformative take on Beatles ballad *The Fool On The Hill*. Carefully layered yet playful, these continually unfolding forms are less about exposition and more about restraint on a sweeping marvel of the unknown.

## ALSO RELEASED

### 6161

★★★★★

6161

SEVERN SONGS. DL/LP



Ex-Run Logan Run drummer Matt Stockham Brown shows his compositional

might on 6161's debut. Held down by thumping grooves and the cinematic pulse of Dan Moore's marauding Moog bass, a triple sax and trumpet horn section weave through Prowl's punchy motifs and two-part shadow play *Sneakanon*, writhing like angry snakes on *Morag*. As tense as a Bernard Herrmann score, filmmakers take note.

### Anouar Brahema

★★★★★

After The Last Sky

ECM. CD/DL/LP



Anouar Brahema albums are a rare delicacy. Eight years after *Blue Maqams* the Tunisian oud

maestro re-enlists Django Bates (piano) and Dave Holland (bass) alongside Anja Lechner (cello) for a drum-free set predicated on rich Arabic maqams. From the upbeat *Dancing Under Meteorites* and heady title track to the multi-layered *Sweet Oranges Of Jaffa*, the players' sensitive melodic dialogue blurs the lines between form and freedom.

### Joe Armon-Jones

★★★★★

All The Quiet (Part I)

AQUARI. CD/DL/LP



The first of two conceptually-linked albums from Ezra Collective's ever-busy

keyboardist and vibes-master paints on a broad canvas, welding funky shades of Herbie Hancock's fusion era with a heavy dub influence and much post-production tomfoolery. Augmented by a starry cast including Nubya Garcia, Greentea Peng and Yazmin Lacey, Armon-Jones marshals this melting pot of styles with a nimble lightness of touch.

### William Hooker

★★★★★

A Time Within

VALLEY OF SEARCH. DL/LP



Subtitled: *Live At The New York Jazz Museum, January 14, 1977*, these recently unearthed recordings of the short-lived William Hooker Reality Trio are red hot – Hooker's thunderous percussive acrobatics an open invitation for saxophonists David S Ware and Alan Braufman to cut loose. Viscerally in the moment, it starts at full-throttle and never lessens. A million miles from waistcoat jazz, it's utterly wild, but far from formless. AC





Circular motion: Nels Cline is primed for the long haul.

## Nels Cline

★★★★★

### Consentrik Quartet

BLUE NOTE. CD/DL/LP

The Wilco guitarist and avant-jazz explorer finds new roads in a classic format.

THE DEBUT album by Nels Cline's latest outing as a leader is loose-limbed hard-bop futurism in a foursome with saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock, bassist Chris Lightcap and drummer Tom Rainey, set loose in an immersive suspense of reverb and prolonged sustain — as if Sonny Rollins had cut his 1962 quartet classic with Jim Hall, *The Bridge*, in the black night of Miles Davis's *In A Silent Way*. In *The Returning Angel*, Laubrock threads long, warm breaths of horn through Cline's contemplative spirals of guitar, a spell deftly grounded by Lightcap's irregular stroll. The 23 has a crisp, strutting urgency bound by Laubrock's tendrils of tenor and Cline's treble-cascade fills; Surplus is an intoxicating vertigo of parallel sax and guitar slaloms. There's also room to rock in Satomi, a jubilant mosaic of riffs and full-group improv named after the singer-bassist in Deerhoof. This is a new band, but it already sounds primed for the long haul.

David Fricke

## Songdog

★★★★★

### Mirabilia Mundi

JUNKYARD SONGS. CD/DL/LP

More top-drawer songs of despair. Al Steele of The Korgis produces.



As fans Bruce Springsteen and Robert Wyatt can attest, Lyndon Morgans, AKA

Songdog, has long been a gifted, fearless songwriter given to stockpiling arresting images. Time's arrow at his back, new violinist Bethan Frieze and long-term foil Karl Woodward in tow, this sometime playwright from Blackwood, Wales is still sculpting heart's-done-time melancholy, reverie, black comedy and poetry into extraordinary shapes. If Eucharist's queasy strings and unchained arrangement seem to tap the kind of know-how/daring which ennobled Sinatra vehicle *It Was A Very Good Year*, *Mirabilia Mundi*'s title track, too, works wonders on the sensorium, modulating interludes, apocalyptic mellotron, and talk of "an 11th commandment scorched on a door" all feeding into a fevered list song with Neil-Young-wanting-it-darker guitar. Morgans' spooked, bruised world can be unnerving, but you won't want to look away.

James McNair



## Various

★★★★★

### Chet Baker Reimagined

DECCA. CD/DL/LP

Fifteen artists revive vocal hits of the chisel-jawed jazzman for a new generation.

When the LP *Chet Baker Sings* came out in 1954 some jazz buffs responded with "please don't". Nonetheless a great trumpeter's turn to breathy, drowsy, little-boy-lost vocalising found a flock of fans who cared more for swoonsome ballads than hot bebop. Many of the artists here, male and female, stick close to the script: dodie, Matilda Mann and Benny Sings from Holland tackle standards in intimate, subdued style. Only soulster Joel Culpepper sounds more Barry White than Baker on Silver Lining. My Funny Valentine falls to Matt Maltese and his dreamlike interpretation is a standout, while Hohen Ford turns supper-club staple I Get Along Without You Very Well into something touchingly personal. Technically, everyone sounds a better singer than Baker was in 1954 with his dodgy intonation. Yes, there's

plenty that's sentimental here but plenty that's stylish too. Your grandmother's record collection is cool again.

John Bungey

## Prince Fatty

★★★★★

### Dub Battle For Seattle

LOVEDUB LIMITED. DL/LP

Cavernous dub cuts of Little Roy's Nirvana covers LP.

Back in 2011, rising producer Prince Fatty broke the mould with *Battle For Seattle*, an against-the-grain Nirvana tribute album led by the veteran Jamaican roots vocalist Little Roy, turning angst-ridden grunge into reggae lullabies. This belated dub companion LP was definitely worth the wait: Fatty strips down the rhythms to their bare essentials and includes elements absent from the original release, so we find an unheard melodica on the dub of Heart-Shaped Box and Nyabinghi percussion bubbling beneath Come As You Are; the About A Girl remix has phased horns and the dub of Dive emphasises the 'flying cymbal' drumming style at play. Although Lithium and On



A Plain are sadly missing, dubs of Son Of A Gun and Sliver have shimmering optimism and deft blasts of delay trap vocal fragments into echoing segues, giving everything a dreamlike quality.

David Katz

## Tunde Adebimpe

★★★★★

### Three Black Boltz

SUB POP. CD/DL/LP

TV On The Radio frontman goes solo.



Tunde Adebimpe chose a curious time to launch his solo career at the end of 2024, coinciding as it did with a reunion tour of his old band. *Three Black Boltz*, though, is more a shiny recalibration of TVOTR's high-density art rock than a radical restart, especially of their more electronic, funky and pop-facing side. So the terrific Magnetic works as a belated sequel to 2008's *Dancing Choose*, and the LP's general air of fighting for joy in the wake of tragedy (the death of Adebimpe's younger sister) aligns with the mood of the band's 2014 swan song, *Seeds*. Adebimpe grasps the opportunity to be more playful, too, whether it's quoting *Swinging On A Star* on Pinstack or firing up dancehall reggae's classic Slang Teng rhythm halfway through album standout *The Most*. Only Somebody New feels like it's straining too hard for 2025 mainstream currency; how

odd that, simultaneously, it should be so reminiscent of Oakey & Moroder's *Together In Electric Dreams*.

John Mulvey

## Bobby Rush & Kenny Wayne Shepherd

★★★★★

### Young Fashioned Ways

DEEP RUSH/THIRTY TIGERS. CD/DL

Entertaining inter-generational blues summit.



Kenny Wayne Shepherd met Bobby Rush backstage at a blues festival. There was a jam, a connection made, and a promise to record together when respective schedules allowed it. When they did, in December 2023, the pair went into Memphis's Royal Studios with a band featuring Hi Records drummer Steve Potts and organist Charles Hodges. Taking Muddy Waters' 1977 *Hard Again* as their template — when Muddy rediscovered his mojo with producer Johnny Winter — Rush, 91, and Shepherd, 47, deliver a set of elemental blues with chitlin circuit thrills. The highpoints are two new Rush/Shepherd co-pens: *Who Was That and Hey Baby* (What Are We Going To Do), the first named, a someone-did-me-wrong Chicago styled blues featuring Rush in soulful voice; the second, raw and thumping in hill country blues style.

Lois Wilson

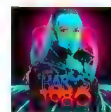
## Chris Harms

★★★★★

1980

NAPALM. CD/DL/LP

Solo debut for Lord Of The Lost singer drops guitars for early-'80s-style synths.



Musical genre labels don't adhere easily to Chris Harms. He's a classically-trained cellist, whose long-time Hamburg band Lord Of The Lost are tagged as a goth/metal outfit, but they competed as Germany's Eurovision entry in 2023 prior to supporting Iron Maiden on a stadium tour. A previous side-project, Harms & Kapelle, embraced rockabilly styles, while here he's gone the full Giorgio Moroder/Conny Plank route, recalling *Dare-era* Human League or Depeche Mode, employing a sea of vintage synthesizers on 11 new songs which combine often melancholic English language lyrics with danceable, uplifting melodies. Harms' abiding strength is writing hook-filled choruses, and it's easy to imagine tunes like *Unamor* or *Missed Call* on early-'80s editions of *Top Of The Pops* or its German equivalent, *Formel Eins*. A tribute to the music of his childhood, it's a very personal record and a highly enjoyable one as well.

Max Décharné



## Lola Kirke

★★★★★

Trailblazer

ONE RIOT. DL/LP

Third album from actor, author and daughter of Free/Bad Company's Simon Kirke.



With a memoir comprised of short stories and parts in Mozart In The Jungle and Gone Girl to her name, it's a wonder Lola Kirke has time for her country music. She's traditional enough and sufficiently steel-guitar heavy to grace the Grand Ol' Opry, but her wry, storytelling country has a distinctly 21st-century lyrical twist and Kacey Musgraves producer Daniel Tashjian keeps her twang contemporary. There's a barbed song about her father (Zeppelin III: "his new wife: she's so nice") and another about her mother (Marlboro Lights & Madonna: "talking sweet trash and ashin' in her coffee cup"), but there's a drinking song (241s), the not-wholly-unrelated bleary morning after remorse of Hungover Thinkin' ("Who did I offend? Who did I piss off?") and a homage to New York (Bury Me in NYC). Maybe she should invest more time in music.

John Aizlewood

## Unknown Mortal Orchestra

★★★★★

IC-02 Bogotá

DEAD OCEANS. CD/DL/LP

Improvised instrumental set recorded at Estudio Naranja in the Colombian capital.



Experimenting in the wake of UMO's 2023 double LP V, Ruban Nielson delivers the second instalment of his instrumental album series, titled after the city of its creation, and following 2018's IC-01 Hanoi. These freestyle band sessions were a way of introducing new keyboard player Christian Li to the line-up and as ever with Nielson, the results involve inventive production

treatments. Percussionist Jose David Infante's polyrhythms are covered with a layer of sonic murk behind Li's deft electric piano soloing in Earth 1, while Heaven 7 could be Kraftwerk indulging in a spot of spacey lounge music. Overall, it sounds like a mysterious third generation cassette found on a faraway market stall in the early '80s. As intriguing as it is, it's of course lacking the focus of Nielson's brilliant songwriting and characterful voice, while likely offering him vital creative inspiration for his next record proper.

Tom Doyle

## Yann Tiersen

★★★★★

Rathlin From A Distance/The Liquid Hour

MUTE. CD/DL/LP

French instrumental doyen marries introspection with righteous resistance.



Tiersen's latest was galvanised by a sailing odyssey around coastal Europe, during

which the helmsman/composer contemplated a politically tumultuous globe. "The sea is the ultimate reality," he declares in the accompanying notes. "It really hits home, the bullshit of borders." Thus, its opening procession of elegiac solo piano études come punctuated by moments of raw emotion, like the piercing high notes that suddenly disrupt the otherwise contemplative Papa Stour, while the title track, inspired by views of County Antrim's scenic Rathlin Island, is an exercise in crepuscular melancholy that inexorably yields to uplifting chordal beauty – shafts of sunlight dispelling the gloom. The four tracks that comprise *The Liquid Hour*, meanwhile, evince Tiersen's skill as an electronic orchestrator – memorably on the ambitiously arranged Dolores, a stirring, female vocal-decorated tribute to Spanish anti-Fascist heroine Dolores Ibárruri that is a veritable "¡No Pasarán!" in lavish, synth-propelled form.

David Sheppard

## Snapped Ankles

★★★★★

Hard Times Furious Dancing

THE LEAF LABEL. CD/DL/LP

Defiant fifth from London's arboreal electro-sprites.



They might make a point of looking as if they come from another realm, but even

through their leafy forest-folk disguise it's clear Snapped Ankles are plugged into the real world. Like 2019's *Stunning Luxury*, *Hard Times Furious Dancing* throws itself at modern existence, inevitably becoming paranoid and angry, slightly losing its grip at the edges. While the strident garble of Pay The Rent and the anti-corporate Personal Responsibilities outline hard cost-of-living realities, their musical coping mechanisms soon become wilder. *Dancing In Transit* stockpiles bits of The Fall and Drexciya, while Raoul's howling wolf-pack electro drags out an unexpected musical theatre relic. Even the more nuanced steel-pipe clank of Hagen Im Garten or Smart World's imagined Conny Plank-Brian Eno dialogue promises imminent frenzy. It's a record where everything escalates quickly – proof Snapped Ankles know exactly how to read the room.

Victoria Segal

## Wolfgang Flür

★★★★★

Times

CHERRY RED. CD/DL/LP

Former Kraftwerk rhythm robot aided by Hooky and Daft Punk.



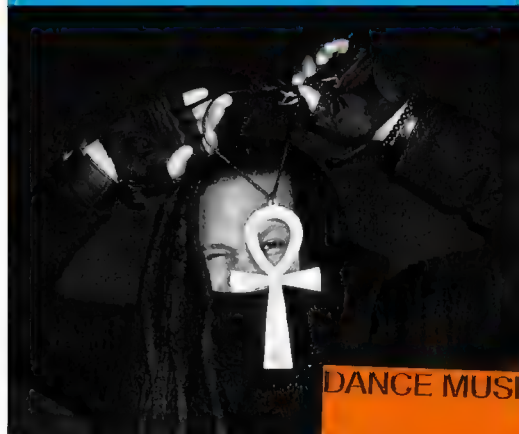
"We are standing here/Exposing ourselves." Were the English lyrics

to Kraftwerk's Showroom Dummies subversive smut? Or just non-native speakers creating inadvertent laughs? This ambiguity runs through *Times*, with Flür's vocoder-ed vocals suggesting a furtive automaton of intriguingly uncertain intent. Flür is now 77 and *Times* feels like a valedictory vista – across time, money, sex and space travel. Former Joy Division/New Order man Peter Hook adds signature bass lines on Über All and Monday To The Moon. Detroit techno great Juan Atkins oils the machine locomotion on Posh. There's also input from Yello's Boris Blank, Daft Punk's Thomas Bangalter and sometime Kraftwerk lyricist Emil Schult. As with Kraftwerk's aspirations to a galvanic resuscitation of Schubert lieder, it all amounts to a kind of electronic wunderkammer – a beautiful old display cabinet full of pretty diodes and collectible drum machines.

Roy Wilkinson

# ELECTONICA

BY STEPHEN WORTHY



## Hieroglyphic Being

★★★★★

Dance Music 4 Bad People

SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND. DL/LP

Elemental grooves reignite the original Chicago house flame.

As someone transfixed by the musical alchemy performed by DJ Ron Trent at Chicago's Muzik Box in the mid-'80s, Jamal Moss – AKA Hieroglyphic Being – knows the restorative power of house music. It has splintered into countless shards since then, of course, but Moss presents its base materials in all their glory here. Rhythms that veer between raw power, the transcendent, and hypnotic. Melodies soar towards the heavens and then swoop dramatically earthwards. Moss calls it 'rhythmic cubism', an art form that manifests in organ-studded epics that shift tempo from breakneck to a crawl and back again (I'm In A Strange Loop), military drum workouts (The Secret Teachings Of The Ages) and melancholic acid (The Map Of Salt & Stars). With a healthy dollop of Afro mysticism, Hieroglyphic Being aims to take you to a higher state of consciousness. There's plenty of fun to be had there.

DANCE MUSIC

4

BAD PEOPLE

## ALSO RELEASED

### Sandwell District

★★★★★

End Beginnings

THE POINT OF DEPARTURE. CD/DL/LP



In the late '90s, this Anglo-American production collective created an uncompromising

aesthetic – dark, minimal, relentless – that saw them lauded by technoheads. After a lengthy hiatus, members Function and Regis here pay tribute to cohort Silent Servant, who died suddenly last year. Striding purposefully between sinewy, heads-down grooves and contemplative soundscapes, *End Beginnings* can fill rooms – but is equally devastating on headphones.

### DJ Koze

★★★★★

Music Can Hear Us

PAMPA. CD/DL/LP



Having risen to fame with German rap outfit Fischmob, Stefan Kozalla – AKA DJ Koze – went on to achieve global recognition as the purveyor of sprawling oddball house and disco with a psychedelic twist. But Koze's third album is, at its heart, a pop record. Whether it's the Damon Albarn-embellished Afro-pop of Pure Love or Buschtaxi's wonky take on reggaeton, delightful weirdness seeps from every pore.

### Barker

★★★★★

Stochastic Drift

SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND. DL/LP



Perhaps fuelled by the comfort that nostalgia affords in uncertain times, a notch of contemporary electronic music artists are currently reviving early-21st century minimalism and mid-'90s dubtronica to blissful effect. Sam Barker does it as well as anyone. Six years after his acclaimed debut, *Utility*, *Stochastic Drift* is a radiant light cutting through the gloom, illuminating icy drone, crepuscular ambient and reverb-heavy beatless trips.

### Daniel Brandt

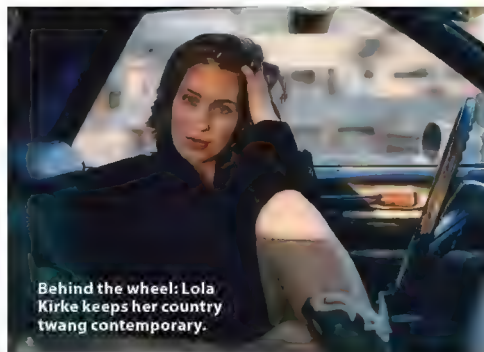
★★★★★

Without Us

ERASED TAPES. DL/LP



The wasteful packaging that Daniel Brandt – one-third of German electronic outfit Brandt Brauer Frick – encountered while shopping for avocados near his east London home has inspired this collection of rollicking alt-techno that bristles with energy and purpose. Brandt confronts attitudes to climate change with thinly-veiled despair, whether delivered with propulsive rave urgency (PNK) or simmering, early-hours shuffle (Lucid). SW



Behind the wheel: Lola Kirke keeps her country twang contemporary.





## Lonnie Holley

★★★★★

Tonky

JAGJA GUA WAR. CD/DL/LP

Alabama starsailor's startling rematch with Jackknife Lee.

For this improv seer's seventh studio venture, Holley, now 75, reprises his team-up with sometime U2 producer Jackknife Lee, leaving far behind not only the abstract acoustic tinklings of his early-2010s *Dust-To-Digital* releases, but even 2023's Jackknife-helmed *Oh Me Oh My*. Titled after Holley's childhood nickname (he lived in a honky-tonk), *Tonky* really warrants co-headline billing for Lee, whose hi-tech audio sculpture around Holley's holler, using drum machines, synths, Davide Rossi-arranged strings and assorted guests (subtle brass from Alabaster DePlume and Angel Bat Dawid), is breathtaking throughout. To a cinematic Cluster electro-chug, nine-minute *Seeds* gives Holley's flashbacks to beatings at the Alabama Industrial School For Negro Children a terrifying widescreen impact. Yet there unfolds a panoramic

breadth in theme and mood, from the prettily pattering Protest With Love right through to *A Change Is Gonna Come*'s climactic civil rights-era gospel chorale. It's like *Lonnie: The Movie* in sound – an absolute blockbuster.

Andrew Perry

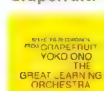
## Yoko Ono/The Great Learning Orchestra

★★★★★

Selected Recordings From Grapefruit

KARL. CD/DL/LP

The first ever recording of compositions from Ono's landmark 1964 publication, *Grapefruit*.



One of the pleasures of the recent Yoko Ono exhibition at London's Tate Modern was being able to study the original early-'60s scores and texts. Of course, many of these haiku-like instructions were never intended to be performed. However, a number of specific pieces can and have been "played" down the years, and now Leif Jordansson and Pelle Halvarsson's Stockholm-based collective have brought them all together for their own performances across these two discs. They range from the short and comic (*Sweep Piece* is the sound of producer Robin McGinley brushing a room for two minutes) to longer,

studio-based ensemble performances that are often surprisingly beautiful, especially the six-minute *Overtone Piece* ("Make music only with overtones") and 14-minute opener *Secret Piece* which asks an orchestra to, "Decide on one note you want to play [in] the woods from 5am to 8am in the summer". The results are heavenly.

Andrew Male

## Jethro Tull

★★★★★

Curious Ruminant

INSIDE OUT. CD/DL/LP

After a 19-year hiatus, Tull's third album since 2022.



Ian Anderson has a lot to say at the moment, in a burst of late-flowering creativity and, literally, in songs rich in imagery and detail. On the title track, he's "wond'ring aloud" on existential matters and just as that's a reference to a song from 1971's *Aqualung*, *Curious Ruminant* references many of the band's musical hallmarks. There are jig-like structures led by Anderson's sprightly flute, and on *Over Jerusalem* the combination of acoustic strum, twinkling celeste, electric power chords and busy bass lines shares musical DNA with *Thick As A Brick*. Drink From The Same Well weighs in at an intriguing 17 minutes. Anderson wryly advises us to "chew it over" but although there are lengthy passages of mellifluous flute playing, the

largely instrumental composition is rather lacking in focus. But there is much to enjoy here in the more concise songs.

Mike Barnes

## Graham Reynolds

★★★★★

Mountain

FIRE. CD/DL/LP

Film, stage and TV composer soundtracks his personal storyline.



Reynolds' aural documentation of his own psychogeography, rather than a complement to the films or stagings of others. Effectively, it's his debut solo album as it decouples him from any external inspiration. In this spirit, the opener is *Monadnock*, a short pedal-steel adorned wash of sound titled after the first mountain he climbed while living in New England. Aspects of Reynolds's best-known soundtracks – Bernie; The Journeyman; Before Midnight – point to *Mountain*, as does his recent music for Hitchcock's silent film *The Lodger*. Vocals from fellow Austin resident and Half Japanese mainstay Jad Fair and Italian singer Marta Del Grandi bring tonal shading. With this unified suite seamlessly encompassing affections for Bernard Herrmann, Ennio Morricone, *Einstürzende Neubauten* and

his fondness for brutally percussive punctuation, Graham Reynolds has found his inner Aaron Copland.

Kieron Tyler

## Monde UFO

★★★★★

Flamingo Tower

FIRE. CD/DL/LP

LA avant-garde collective follow-up 2023's 7171.



The core of Monde UFO are West Coast-based multi-instrumentalist Ray Monde and visual artist Kris Chau. The inner sleeve depicts both posing at the base of a transmission tower – the image encapsulating the idea behind the record. With titles and lyrics as if from an automatic writing experiment, and sonic techniques from places where – in Lenny Kaye terms – the lightning struck (eg, from dub propagators Keith Hudson and Mad Professor; The United States Of America's quirky psychedelia; Charlie Parker's bold bebop), *Flamingo Tower* broadcasts its eclectic and haunted sounds. Highlights include the King Tubby-ish blurry delay of *Old Town Pollution*, conjuring up scenes (and utilising the main theme) from Jim Jarmusch's *Permanent Vacation*.

Irina Shtreis

## Pierre Bastien & Louis Laurain

★★★★★

C(or)N(e)T

ROSE HILL. CD/DL/LP

Two generations of Gallic experimentalists make beautiful music together.



If Tony Hart had made a first-rate dub album with Joe Gibbs at the controls and Plasticine sidekick Morph on occasional didgeridoo, it might have sounded something like this consistently captivating six-track collaboration. The eternally playful Bastien has three releases on Apex Twin's Replex label to his name and junior partner Laurain has already gone the distance with Stephen O'Malley and Éliane Radigue, but while such ear-catching credits give you some clue as to the kind of territory they are excavating here, the duo's homespun toolkit of automaton mutes, underwater trumpets and rotating paintbrush heads on contact mike drums (among other inventions) creates a series of unique atmospheres. From the murky depths of opener *Sea & Tea* to bluesy *Last Post* finale *Sea Shanty*, these bespoke flotation tanks are a joy to dive into.

Ben Thompson

Josh Coleman

## Hannah Cohen

★★★★★

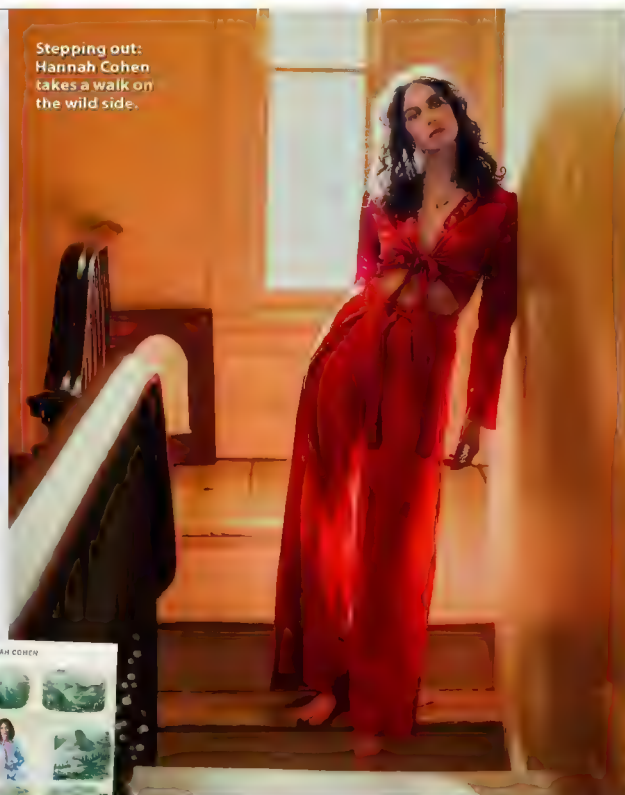
Earthstar Mountain

BELLA UNION. CD/DL/LP

NY songwriter sets out for the Catskills, finds a whole new sound.

WHEN BROOKLYN-BASED singer Cohen quit the city, an epiphany occurred. NYC had her struggling to write in her tiny bathroom (mid-album track *Shoe*: "I'm not lost, just kinda stuck/You get behind and then you're fucked"). In the forest everything changed. On opener *Dusty* – shimmering, articulate pop-rock, the vocal a laid-back Minnie Riperton – strings and guitars blend in a hazy 1970s vibe, flutes trilling like birds. With sprawling Fleetwood Mac-adjacent slide guitar by Sam Evian (AKA Cohen's partner Sam Owens) and BVs from Sufjan Stevens, *Mountain* mourns the loss of a friend yet it's upbeat ("a distant star flashes your mischief"). And there's no loss of urban street-smarts: droll pop-rocker *Draggin'*, a take on toxic families with a skanky 10cc bass line, finds Cohen cooing like Kate Bush as she rolls her eyes: "Such a drag..." A walk on the wild side, it turns out, that's unleashed a freewheeling new strength.

Glyn Brown







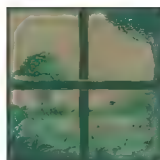
**Anika**

★★★★

Abyss

SACRED BONES. CD/DL/LP

Recorded live at Berlin's Hansa Studios, Anika's latest has a direct swagger previous efforts lacked. Born from raw feelings and seething frustration, bitter truths spew forth on Walk Away, the anti-fascist One Way Ticket and sassy title track, dispatched in a Nico-esque drawl over battalions of fuzzy guitars. AC



**Dirty Projectors & Stargaze**

★★★★★

Song Of The Earth

TRANSGRESSIVE. DL

A large ensemble piece by Dirty Projector's David Longstreth, performed by DPs with German chamber orchestra stargaze and inspired by climate change. Heroic in its scope and shifting moods, it's more performance piece than repeated listen. CP



**Djo**

★★★★

The Crux

AWAL. DL/LP

Actor Joe Keery plays Steve 'The Hair' Harrington in Stranger Things and his retro-pop stylings are just as keenly observed and affable. ELO-ish introspection (Lonesome Is A State Of Mind) gives way to new wave (Link; Back On You) and some toothsome McCartney confections (Charlie's Garden; Golden Line). JB



**Infinity Knives & Brian Ennals**

★★★★★

A City Drowned In God's Black Tears

PHANTOM LIMB. DL/LP

This Baltimore hip-hop duo excel in pursuing the unexpected. Ennals' bold lyrics explore mental health struggles, Trump, capitalism and Palestine with gallows wit over unpredictable productions. One of a kind. AC



**Cameron Keiber**

★★★★★

Nurser

MIDRIFF. CD/DL/LP

Once of '90s US noise band The Beatings, Keiber's noir-ish solo LP occupies rich ground between Nick Cave and R.E.M.; where interior shadowplays meet political frustrations. Amid Deadloop's distinctly Dylanesque vibes he observes, "You live in the minor chord..." Just the place for these bleak yet tender songs. JB



**Lullahush**

★★★★★

Ithaca

FUTURE CLASSIC. DL/LP

Further hallucinatory sonics from Daniel McIntyre. The Dubliner hears sound differently, his glitchy yet beautiful homage to his home city taking in warped birdsong, keening (funeral singing), reel (folk dance) and an uncle crooning Raglan Road, as seemingly disparate oddities transform into earworms. AC



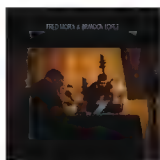
**Mien**

★★★★★

Mien

FUZZCLUB. CD/DL/LP

A psych conglomerate formed at SXSW featuring Black Angels' Alex Maas, Rishi Dhir from The Elephant Stone and other motorik travellers. Electricity hums within locked grooves as pitches shift from hypnotic to bare-wire energy, sometimes in the same song (Silent Golden). Clinic fans will dig this. JB



**Fred Moten & Brandon Lopez**

★★★★★

Fred Moten & Brandon Lopez

TAO FORMS. DL/LP

The first studio outing by this theorist/bassist duo unleashes a vortex of poetic ideas laden with emotional weight. Playful and cerebral, Moten's reassuring burr is matched by Lopez's percussive use of his instrument's body. AC



**Lee 'Scratch' Perry, Peter Harris & Fritz Catlin**

★★★★★

Mercy

DASH THE HEDGE. DL/LP

Amid an afterlife of pervasively iffy releases bearing LSP's name, here's a cracker, created by his artwork collaborator Harris and 23 Skidoo percussionist Catlin, who conjure out-there Scratchian playfulness and musicality. AP



**Tenebrous Liar**

★★★★★

Hell Never Called

DEATHTO. DL/LP

Enlivened with fresh blood, the first TL LP in eight years is also their freest, Steve Gullick's ethereal ghost poems delivered with menace. Mood-building masters, from What Am I's late-night regrets to Tattooed Hearts' blurry-eyed blues, a noir beauty prevails. AC



**Vega Trails**

★★★★★

Sierra Tracks

GONDWANA. CD/DL/LP

Enhanced by brooding strings, the sweeping narratives of bassist Milo Fitzpatrick's second LP as Vega Trails centre on his interplay with Portico Quartet bandmate Jordan Smart (sax) and Taz Modi (piano). Becalming and brilliant, it cuts a swathe through the Madrid mountain range that inspired it. AC



**Simon Wells**

★★★★★

Perpendicular Universe

CRIME PAYS. CD/LP

Southport songwriter's second solo set delivers wistful folkie originals and covers (Spencer The Rover; My Girl by Madness) in a sawdust rasp that stirs traces of a punk past on such emotive highlights as haunted ballad Better Times or The Last Laugh's Faces whirl. JB

**EXTENDED PLAY**

**Anoushka Shankar**

**Chapter III: We Return To Light**

LEITER. DL/LP

THE THIRD in Shankar's trilogy of EPs brings us full circle in time – to the early morning where Chapter I began – but relocates the musical mood to India (after London and California), bringing in as collaborators Alam Khan (son of Ali Akbar Khan) on sarod, and the percussionist Sarathy Korwar. The theme of the musicians' heritage is keenly felt on opener Daybreak, which finds Khan and Shankar playing almost as one over a growing bass line. On Hiraeth (the Welsh term for a nostalgic homesickness), Shankar dances with an insistent motif over an emotion-tugging background. Other titles hint at a world going awry – Dancing On Scorched Earth, very Massive Attack-like – with sanctuary lying in humanity's better nature (We Burn So Brightly, We Return To Love). Shankar hoped these EPs' spontaneity would discourage the scrutiny a statement album receives, but in totality they deserve proper investigation.

David Hutcheon



Leading light: Anoushka Shankar comes full circle on her latest EP.



# Kings of the road

The start of Kraftwerk's imperial phase – or the end of the road for Hütter and Schneider's original project? By John Mulvey.

## Kraftwerk



### Autobahn

PARLOPHONE, DL/LP/BR

**1**975 IN THE Motor City, and Lester Bangs is unsuccessfully hassling Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider to pose for photographs by a Detroit freeway. Soon enough, Kraftwerk will create a fully-automated music, a sound local Michigan producers will streamline even further into techno. For now, though, their replacement by robots is a distant fantasy, and the advent of music entirely generated by AI even more remote. The journalist, not Kraftwerk, is the one who seems most invested in an idea of electronic music where flesh and blood artists are rendered obsolete.

In a piece which eventually appears in both Creem and NME, Bangs pontificates at length about the imminence of our machine overlords and "The Cybernetic Inevitable". "What's to stop the machines," he asks, "from eventually taking over?"

"It's like a car," Florian Schneider explains to him. "You have the control, but it's your decision how much you want to control it. If you let the wheel go, the car will drive somewhere, maybe off the road."



"Kraftwerk had made their first masterpiece, and would soon evolve into the most sophisticated of electropop groups."

started work on *Autobahn* in their Düsseldorf studio, Rother had teamed up with Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Dieter Moebius in Harmonia, upgrading the old implements of guitar, bass and drums with a new arsenal of synthesizers.

*Autobahn* wasn't quite without precedent, then, and it didn't sound exactly like the future, either. The first thing you hear on the title track is a human intervention, a driver climbing into the machine, slamming the door and putting a key in the ignition. The car is not a futuristic prototype, more likely one designed nearly 30 years earlier; Hütter's Volkswagen Beetle. The journey navigates the "Weiße Streifen, grüner Rand" (White stripes, green edge) of the A555 towards producer Conny Plank's studio in Wolperath, near Cologne; a motorway completed in 1932, six months before Hitler came to power in Germany. *Autobahn* is, if anything, retro-futuristic, not least when the deadpan vocals echo The Beach Boys of the early '60s at their preppiest.

The next 22 minutes and 46 seconds are packed with incident. *Autobahn* rhapsodises the banality of driving as a transcendent experience, but there are changes of speed, different terrains and regions to traverse, and a regular reminder – in those quavering harmonies – that an unpredictable creature has their hands on the wheel. Around nine and a half

minutes in, the trip runs into jeopardy, with hazardous overtaking manoeuvres and anxious horn parps.

"We have done electronic accidents," Florian Schneider told Lester Bangs in 1975, alluding to how chance still had a role to play in Kraftwerk's music.

That becomes more evident on the electro-acoustic side two of *Autobahn*, often neglected in the wake of the extraordinary title track. *Kometenmelodie 1* (Comet Melody) and *Mitternacht* (Midnight) are ominous, sepulchral, the sound of keen experimenters learning how to create atmospherics with Minimoog, EMS Synthi and ARP Odyssey, and decent trial runs for the next Kraftwerk album, *Radio-Activity*. *Morgenspaziergang* (Morning Walk) is weirdly enchanted, with a fluttering recorder melody and glitchy electro-birdsong that suggests a Karlheinz Stockhausen pastorate. But *Kometenmelodie 2*, its lush refrain an electronic retooling of the 19th century classical tradition, is as good an indication of where Kraftwerk are heading as *Autobahn* itself – toward a romantic, stainless future, to Europe Endless, The Robots, Spacelab and beyond.

This latest iteration of *Autobahn* does not, of course, have any extra tracks – just Hütter's new Dolby Atmos Mix for the Blu-ray, and a vinyl picture disc that uses the 2009 remaster. No demos, alternate takes or lost songs have made it out of their Kling Klang studio; Kraftwerk might not have been entirely infallible in 1974, but they've done everything to make it look as if they were since. More than ever, though, it sounds like a bridge between the eccentricities of early Kraftwerk and the perfect Mensch-Maschine they became.

The three-minute single edit of *Autobahn* started a musical revolution, but perhaps it wasn't the shock of the new that originally propelled it to success in the States. For all the track's subsequent influence, *Autobahn* was ostensibly a '70s novelty hit like *Convoy* or *Disco Duck*, with its strange Mitteleuropean othering of rock'n'roll's car and freeway fetish, its arch Beach Boys pastiche. Kraftwerk had made their first masterpiece, and would soon evolve into the most sophisticated and radio-friendly of electropop groups. But to date, they've never had another hit single in the US.



#### BACK STORY: PLANK TONE

● Although Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider remained the core of Kraftwerk, *Autobahn* featured an extended band including percussionist Wolfgang Flür (who stuck around until 1987) and electric violinist Klaus Röder (who left later in 1975). The original cover painting was by Emil Schult, who also helped with the lyrics. Perhaps most importantly, Conny Plank provided engineering, mixing, equipment and studio space at his farmhouse studio. Plank, who began his career as Marlene Dietrich's soundman, worked on records by Neul, Cluster, Ash Ra Tempel, Ultravox and the Scorpions, as well as producing early Kraftwerk. After *Autobahn*, however, Kraftwerk took all engineering and production work in-house.



Dandy highwaymen:  
Kraftwerk's Florian  
Schneider and Ralf Hütter,  
Kling Klang Studio,  
Düsseldorf, 1973.





Rock and roll: Gobblinz have a go at the cool kids.



quality control was dipping, and that discomfiting rictus smile was kicking in.

James McNair



## Bob Mosley

★★★★★

Bob Mosley

OMAD, CD

Moby Grape's bassist steps out on his own.



Bob Mosley was the bassist and one of several singers in Moby Grape, arguably the

most overlooked band to emerge from the 1960s San Francisco Sound. This 1972 solo album has been "sonically enhanced" with AI help, the rhythm section boosted and the entire affair remastered, creating a crystal-clear audio document. Mosley is a killer blue-eyed soul shouter and here his vocals are layered over first rate hard-rock instrumentation. Highlights include Gypsy Wedding, a minor classic that the Grape previously recorded on their 20 *Granite Creek* album. Squaw Valley Nils (Hocked Soul) features Mosley's perfectly multi-tracked falsetto. Let The Music Play is a funkified exhortation that shows off the legendary Memphis Horns who beautifully blow and honk on selected tracks. Thanks is a lovely ballad coloured by pedal steel guitarist Ed Black.

Michael Simmons



## Various

★★★★★

Hit & Run! More Motown Guys

ACE, CD

Superb collection of male voices from Motown's vaults; all tracks new to CD with 15 previously unissued.



Recorded during Motown's 1961-1968 golden age, when Hitsville USA was a dominant influence on American pop, these 25 tracks fell by the wayside yet the standard (as always) is incredibly high, with big hitters rubbing shoulders with unknowns and emotions running amok. The Four Tops' Just Your Love from 1965 captures Levi Stubbs' tension-ratcheting sob over orchestral splendour and has hit written all over it. Likewise the David Ruffin-led Temptations' Since I Don't Have You (not a cover of The Skyliners' song) from '67, a jumble of anguish, hurt and pride, that deserved better. Then there's Motown mystery man Michael Thomas's The Rose Of Love from '65. It's another could-have-been that sounds like a youthful Stevie Wonder having a rave-up.

Lois Wilson

## Various

★★★★★

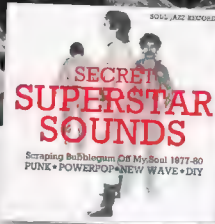
Secret Superstar Sounds

SOUL JAZZ, CD

Powerpearls from the deep: obscure new wave classics rediscovered.

"KEEP YOUR eyes on the NME, make sure you're ahead of me," sneer Peterborough's Gobblinz as they seethe at the cooler-than-thou kids

on London – the lead track on Soul Jazz's fabulous compilation of overlooked British powerpop. Tellingly, on the cover of their 1978 single, one of the band is wearing a decidedly unhip Status Quo-style denim jacket. *Secret Superstar Sounds* celebrates the kind of out-of-towner bands that moved slightly too slow to board the punk bandwagon, but found homes on the pub rock fringes of new wave.



Language School by Poole's Tours was a John Peel fave, while genre zealots will know

Nobody Loves Me by Bath's Letters and The Tunnelrunners' mega-rare Forever Crying At Love Songs. New additions to MOJO's Discogs wants page include It's Hard from Nottingham's Plummet Airlines and The Wardens' Do So Well. Refreshingly unfashionable.

Jim Wirth



## Roy Haynes

★★★★★

Hip Ensemble

WEWANTSOUNDS, LP

Buried treasure by inspired jazz drummer. Includes bonus track Roy's Tune from the same '71 session.

Roxbury, MA's Roy Haynes was a jazz drumming colossus who rang in the changes as sideman for Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane and more. As befits his epoch-trumpeting CV, this first time vinyl reissue of his 1971 solo LP (originally on the Mainstream label) heralds both his and jazz's enormous variety, shifting between spiritual jazz, fusion, post-bebop and Afro-Cuban funk with lyrical ease. Recorded with producer Bob Shad and symbiotic trumpet/tenor sax frontline, the tone is set by Tangiers, a here and now tour de force with jousting horns and Icarus-like flying then falling flute over Haynes's volatile percussive eruptions. Other highs include Satan's Mysterious Feeling, a thrilling

playing-with-abandon funk groove. But it's an album best consumed whole.

Lois Wilson

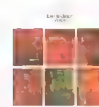
## Joe Henderson

★★★★★

Multiple

CRAFT RECORDINGS, LP

Jazz saxophonist's cult album from 1973 returns as a vinyl-only release.



Many jazz musicians prefer playing live and often view the recording

studio as a necessary evil, but tenor saxophonist Henderson was different, regarding the studio as a vital crucible of invention. "I think that's where I thrive," he revealed in 1993. "There's something about the studio that has a magic about it, that I seem to come alive there." In 1973, Henderson embraced multitrack recording with his most exploratory album, *Multiple*, a rarity that regularly sells secondhand for three figures. With its gnarly avant-jazz topography, the album is a close cousin to Miles Davis's *Bitches Brew*. Supported by Davis alumni, bassist Dave Holland, and drummer Jack DeJohnette, Henderson overdubs multiple instruments to create layered soundscapes bristling with creativity. He also lends his voice on two cuts: chanting on the funk-powered Tress-Cun-Deo-

La and contributing eerie humming to the haunting Song For Sinners. Mesmerising stuff.

Charles Waring

## Gene Clark & Carla Olson

★★★★★

So Rebellious A Lover

SUNSET BLVD, CD/DL LP

1987 duet album that reinvigorated the most tragic Byrd.



So much of Gene Clark's post-Byrds work is overlooked – or at least overshadowed by 1974's *No Other* – but even he must have been surprised by the copper-bottomed quality of *So Rebellious A Lover*. A chance on-stage meeting with Textones singer Carla Olson reignited the best in Clark after years in the post-addiction wilderness, their voices and writing styles meshing like no one else since Gram and Emmylou. The greatest proof is in Clark's vocals never sounding more assured than on the jingle-jangle version of Phil Ochs' *Changes*, and the album's cornerstone track, *Gypsy Rider*, with its aching opening lines, "Crank her over once again/Put your face into the wind", a masterpiece filled with the inevitable loneliness of forever moving on. Olson's strident vocals counterpoint

Clark's weariness and her songwriting, too, was seldom stronger. All 19 tracks of the extended 2018 CD are remastered here, and proto-Americana never sounded better.

Andy Fyfe

## David Lee Roth

★★★★★

The Warner Recordings 1985-1994

RHINO, CD/DL LP

All of Diamond Dave's solo work for Warners in a 5-CD box.



Beach Boys' California Girls – both perfect fits for Roth's persona/MTV-boosted antics – DLR's 1985 EP *Crazy From The Heat* spelt trouble for Van Halen Mk I and launched a solo career which fizzed for a decade, then fizzled. Roth's two LPs with Steve Vai, 1986's *Eat 'Em And Smile* and 1988's *Skyscraper*, were masterclasses in career planning, Vai probably the only Eddie Van Halen-adjacent guitar magus fully equipped to help super-size the joy via Rothian conceits such as Ladies' Nite In Buffalo? and Just Like Paradise. Later, DD's 1994 Nile Rodgers-produced *Your Filthy Little Mouth* spoke of his lifetime love of disco, but



## Holger Czukay

★★★★

Gvoon: Brennung I

GRONLAND. CD/DL/LP

Late Can bassist's lost exercise in minimalism.



In 1997, Czukay was exploring 3D visualisation technology alongside Hamburg painter Arthur Schmidt, AKA Gvoon. Shortly before leaving Can in '77, he'd relinquished his bass in favour of tinkering with tape manipulation, presaging sampling. When Gvoon told Czukay about his stints incarcerated in Stasi prisons in pre-reunification GDR, Holger was suitably inspired by the memories of fear and claustrophobia to create an unsettling ambient piece, with an unspecified purpose. The 32-minute *Gvoon: Brennung I* duly lay unused until last year, when Schmidt created an installation simulating a Stasi interrogation room, and unearthed it as the ideal soundtrack. Released here around Czukay's 87th birthday, this unsettling patchwork of synth moans, clanks and hums is coupled with an equally disturbing half-hour remix by Faust's Zappi Diermaier and die ANGEL. Needless to say, those seeking Mother Sky's locked-groove euphoria should look elsewhere.

Andrew Perry

## Jimmy Page & The Black Crowes

★★★★

Live At The Greek

THE ORCHARD. CD/DL/LP

Master and apprentices' collaboration gets the 25th-anniversary treatment.



In autumn 1999, Jimmy Page, fired up from reunion dates with Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant, stowed away with Atlanta blues-rockers The Black Crowes. This reworked version of their 2000 live LP from LA's Greek Theatre includes 19 new songs (among them the Crowes numbers previously missing due to contractual issues). Wisely, vocalist Chris Robinson adheres to the originals without paying lip service to Zeppelin 'hits' such as *Whole Lotta Love* and the deeper cuts *Hot On For Nowhere* and *Sick Again*. All parties sound like they're having enormous fun, with Page sparking off fellow guitarists Rich Robinson and Audley Freed, and adding even greater depth to the Crowes' hit ballad *She Talks To Angels*. The inclusion of a soundcheck jam, helpfully titled *Jam*, will hook in the Zep completists and invites the question: what would have happened if they'd made it into the studio?

Mark Blake

## Ibex Band

★★★★

Stereo Instrumental Music

MUZIKAWI. DL/LP

Soul, Armenian and traditional elements fuse in languid sessions from the Golden Age of *Éthiopiennes*.



Although coming on like a chilled Booker T & The MG's during this easy listening-style instrumental work out, Ibex Band worked their socks off in the '70s and '80s, on over 250 LPs including backing bandmate Mahmoud Ahmed on his influential *Ere Mela Mela*. Nine of the 12 instrumentals here were recorded on the only 4-track in Ethiopia by Swedish engineer Karl Gustav-Lundgren during the seven-piece's residency at the Ras Hotel in Addis Ababa in summer 1976. Despite a midnight curfew and a prying post-Selassie government, Giovanni Rico and Selam Woldemariam's band clearly relished having their own session, embellishing unhurried grooves and walking bass lines with flute, sax and organ as seemingly familiar '60s-style melodies are transported somewhere else entirely. The Tezeta-infused Zerafewa is typical, melancholy yet joyous, with an insistent refrain that could only hail from the splendid isolation of '70s Ethiopia.

Mark Cooper

## John Lee Hooker

★★★★

The Standard School Broadcast Recordings

BMG. CD/DL/LP

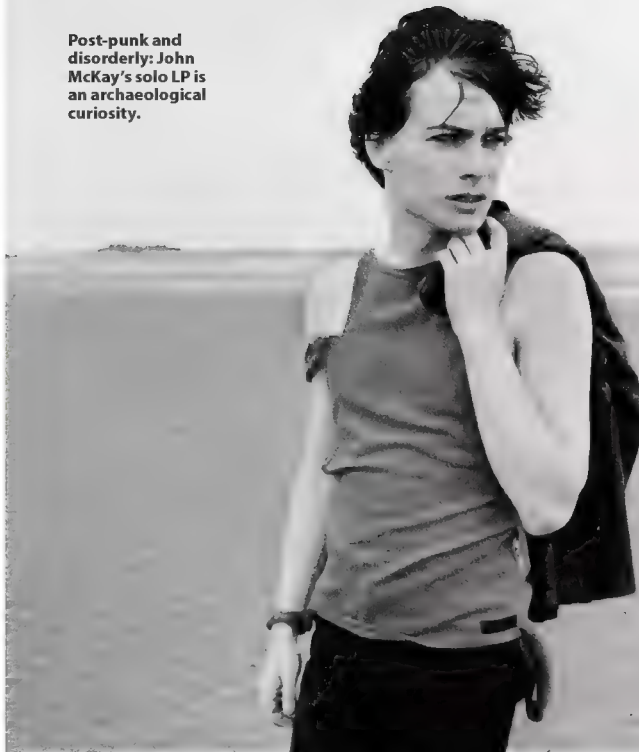
Previously unreleased lost tape of Hooker on top form for a 1973 radio series.



Backed here by stabs of his guitar, a rhythm section and his 20-year-old son Robert on a jazzy and soulfully spare piano, this 1973 educational radio series by John Lee Hooker shows the man at his best. Most of the tracks are in Hooker's slinky slow blues crawl, while a few are in his equally patented boogie rhythm. Hooker was a master of lyrical improvisation, making up both the words and their perfectly-placed flowing tempo. In this period he was enduring challenging problems due to record company malfeasance, and the subjects of songs like *Hard Times* and *I Hate The Day I Was Born* reflect these very real blues. The beauty of Hooker's delivery is his ability to burrow deep within the tunes, never rushing or overdoing them. This is how the blues is meant to be performed.

Michael Simmons

Post-punk and disorderly: John McKay's solo LP is an archaeological curiosity.



# From the air

Post-Banshees work from innovative guitarist goes overground. By Victoria Segal.

## John McKay

★★★★

Sixes And Sevens

TINY GLOBAL PRODUCTIONS. CD/DL/LP

"WE DON'T care if you vanish into thin air," sang Siouxsie Sioux on Drop Dead/Celebration, the B-side of 1980 single Happy House, as much a virulent hex as it was a song. Her curses were aimed at drummer Kenny Morris and guitarist John McKay – "those arty ones," Sioux eye-rolled – who suddenly quit the increasingly factional Banshees in Aberdeen, two days into the tour for the band's second album, *Join Hands*. The pair were so fearful of the singer hunting them down at the station, they furtively left Scotland on a small plane. With good reason: "If I'd come close to either of them, I feel sure I'd have come close to throttling the life out of them," Sioux said in 1998.

If the Banshees would triumphantly replace McKay and Morris with John McGeoch and Budgie, the impact of McKay's unearthed, uninsulated playing on an incoming wave of post-punk musicians – The Jesus And Mary Chain, Steve Albini and the gathering goth hordes included – meant he was never going to vanish as completely as Sioux might have wished. Yet beyond those influential aftershocks, McKay didn't really make his presence felt through new music, apparently turning down a chance to play with Peter Gabriel and releasing

one out-of-sync single, the pizzicato menace of 1987's *Tightrope*, with his band Zor Gabor on Marc Riley's In Tape label.

*Sixes And Sevens* reframes that story, gathering 11 largely unheard tracks written and recorded by McKay and his collaborators – among them Morris, his wife Linda Clark on imperious art-school vocals, Soft Boys bassist Matthew Seligman and Nico's drummer Graham 'Dids' Dowdall – in the years following his stint as a Banshee. Fans will delight in hearing how McKay's line in distinctive clanging wasn't entirely discontinued – especially on the clawed-up Playground Twist of *The Blessed West*, or the minimal scrape of *Looks Can Kill*, which works as an answering echo to Drop Dead/Celebration ("If looks could kill/They'd have tried").

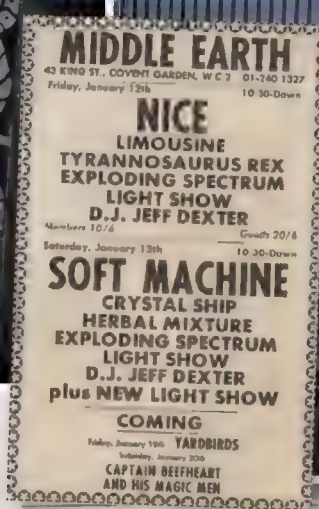
There's a playfulness here too, though, a hint that had McKay managed to thrive in the Banshees, he might not have been wholly out of step with their imminent psychedelic blossoming. The sense of a more eclectic '80s opening up around McKay is tangible. The guitar screams a little less loudly over Flare's primitive saxophone groove; *Fun On The Floor* and *Zen And The Art Of Nonsense* both seem to have been out dancing at some point over the weekend. *Sacred Measure*, meanwhile, introduces a chamber-pop glassiness before McKay's guitar smashes through. *Sixes And Sevens* is, as its title suggests, all over the place, more archaeological curiosity than paradigm-shifting post-punk scroll. Yet it remains a fascinating, unexpected trove of songs, coming out of thin air to make McKay's presence felt once again.







Going underground: (clockwise from above) revellers "doing their own thing" at Middle Earth, February 17, 1968; ME prime movers, Soft Machine, 1968; the venue's entrance, with attendees (possibly) waiting to use the washing machines.



**43 KING STREET  
COVENT GARDEN**

Everyone can come in free during the day from 10 a.m. onwards, to do their own thing, whatever it is; we'll be having sounds, groups can practice here; London's first **DIGGER SHOP** will be opening here, with free clothes, washing machines for use, food, etc., so please bring anything you don't want.

Remember that this is **YOUR** club; if you want it to happen, then we'd like your help. At night there will be groups, films, events, and a few completely unpredictable things, which will blow your minds. Profits from the evenings will go to organisations on the scene, like **SOMA & RELEASE** (The Community Bust Fund).

The Club will be closed on Friday nights, in deference to **UFO**.

**WATCH IT FOR FURTHER NEWS**

This **SATURDAY, 10 AUGUST**, come and choose a name for this environmental space. Votes will take place often.

**PEACE AND LOVE**

# 67 Varieties

A former London music hall didn't know what had hit it in the summer of 1967. By **Jim Irvin**.

**L**AUNCHED AFTER the UFO Club was forced to vacate its original locale beneath the Blarney in Tottenham Court Road, and based initially in Covent Garden from August 1967, Middle Earth became London's prime destination for underground thrills accompanied by liquid lights. At its peak it was hosting big bills three nights a week headlined by the likes of Soft Machine, Traffic, Blossom Toes, Tim Buckley, Jefferson Airplane and Captain Beefheart, all of whom are found in a new Cherry Red 3-CD box called *Middle Earth: The Soundtrack Of London's Legendary Psychedelic Club 1967-1969* ★★★★★.

Says teenaged attendee Jon Newey today: "It was special, a different world entirely to the usual band-plus-audience format of the nearby Marquee, Flamingo and 100 Club and the stale and increasingly violent Mod scene."

Originally sited in the huge basement of 43 King Street, Covent Garden – former location down the years of the 18th century Grand Hotel, Evan's Music Hall and Super Rooms, The Player's Theatre Club and a fruit warehouse, which it remained – it opened on Thursday, August 24 1967, and held an all-nighter the following Saturday featuring Fairport Convention and Sam Gopal's Dream, with the scene's leading lights the Soft Machine playing on the Sunday. DJs John Peel and Jeff Dexter spun suitable discs all weekend. It was not merely a venue but a community hub with

connections to the Release charity, which helped young people arrested for drugs, and an area offering free clothes, washing machines, rehearsal spaces and a café. Boutique manager Jo Cruikshank recalls walking off London's rainy streets, past boxes of pineapples and bananas into a vast space filled with incense, lights, drugs and, of course, music.

A taste of which, taken either from the records Dexter and Peel were playing, or the bands that appeared there, features in this thoroughly enjoyable box. It leads off with A Good Friend Of Mine by Family, exactly the kind of act that thrived there ("Spectacular": Jeff Dexter), and the inspiration for the fictional band in Jenny Fabian's infamous novella *Grouper*. She worked in the Middle Earth box office.

You can hear the music defining itself in tracks like Climbing Up The Wall (See Me) from unreleased sessions by former Mod band The Action a year or so before they mutated into Mighty Baby. I really enjoyed Ten Years After's mellow debut single from 1968, Portable People, which I didn't know, and Dantalion Chariot's trippy workout for sitar and flute, Soma (Parts 1 & 2). Among some psych comp regulars by Paper Blitz Tissue, Mabel Greer's Toyshop and The Electric Prunes, are lesser anthologised tunes like Pye's

sitar-wielding oddity from Wales, Blonde On Blonde, the obscure Dr K's Blues Band, psych-pop from British Elektra's rag-bag of incomers, Election – their single Mark Time – and David Bowie's Lou Reed impersonation and wasp-in-a-jar sax stylings on The Riot Squad's very early cover of I'm Waiting For My Man. There are also some reminders that the scene also included art happenings, with tracks by free jazz ensemble Amalgam, some challenging squonking and bashing by Chris McGregor Septet on Up To Earth and something from the ubiquitous, unclassifiable and always evocative Third Ear Band. There's a sprinkling of solid faves: Fleetwood Mac's Black Magic Woman, Canned Heat's On The Road Again and Canyons Of Your Mind by the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band. Like the UFO, Middle Earth lasted about a year, then, also like the UFO, hosted larger, more sporadic events at the Roundhouse in Camden Town – including the debut London show by Led Zeppelin – before disappearing forever.

To summarise the vibe, check this quote from Jon Newey's interview with Jeff Dexter. "There were two busts and the most horrible one was when we were running a Tribe of the Sacred Mushroom benefit for Release and Gandalf's Garden with King Ida's Watch Chain on a Sunday afternoon." The show was a play based on the Tibetan Book Of The Dead. A device called the Trip Machine was confiscated by police. Different times.







## So-Do

★★★★★

Studio Works '83-'85

TIME CAPSULE. CD/DL LP

Punk, funk and dub collide in small-town Japan.

Part of the disparate Japanese post-punk scene, So-Do emerged in the mountain town of Nagano through the nascent underground music movement centred on the Buddha nightclub. Frontman Hideshi 'Actor' Akuta was rhythm guitarist and saxophonist as well as songwriter, and he steered the budding group towards reggae and dub after hearing Linton Kwesi Johnson and Matumbi records at Buddha. Bassist Yoshifumi Ito opted for funk and lead guitarist Asahi Tsukuda channelled Adrian Belew, and after adding dub effects to live performances, club owner/producer Atsuo Takeuchi launched Café Records to house their output, producing two 7-inch singles and a 12-inch EP before the group disbanded – all of which are gathered here. Get Away couches its capitalist critiques in a rocking reggae skank and Hashiru uses dub elements to emphasise the existential dread; So-Do Theme is frantic post-punk and Morning a dreamy dirge.

David Katz

## De La Soul

★★★★★

The Grind Date

UNIVERSAL. CD/DL LP

Cultured New York rap trio's skit-free seventh LP from 2004, appended with unreleased tracks.



First conceived as the closing chapter of their Art Official Intelligence trilogy, De La Soul continued to push their sound in a starker direction after their Tommy Boy tenure was abruptly terminated. Production hook-ups with Dilla (on top form interweaving Mountain and Rick Wakeman samples on Verbal Clap) and Madlib (thumping anti-materialist lament Shopping Bags) are equalled by giddy duets with Ghostface Killah (the horn-smothered He Comes) and MF Doom (Rock.Co.Kane Flow's ever-shifting tempos), transcending the slightly dull concept (De La as hard-working band) and uninspired cover art. In such

## Various

★★★★★

Barnyard Beehive

NUMERO GROUP. DL CD

Female country from the Numero reissue archive.

NO DOLLY, Tammy or Loretta, this being the Numero label, instead a deep dive into country music's femosphere with obscure voices singing about boy trouble and booze. Country Girl Kay, AKA Helen Evelyn Kay, and Joyce Street provide two highpoints; the former with 1961's No One Loves You Like I Do, which has Kay lullabying sweetly over finger picked guitar. "I want a hug, I want a kiss..." she croons. Meanwhile, Street – anthologised by Numero on 2023's *Tied Down* – brings Mississippi Moonshine, her 1969 story-song romanticising her father's bootlegging business, over upbeat twang. Elsewhere, Vanita Thompson's You Always Break My Heart and Cathy Collins's Token Of Love blur country lines; the first named, Thompson's 1965 sole single, is rose-tinted hopeful edging on girl-group territory; the second is a poignant ballad from 1970 that could almost double as deep soul.

Lois Wilson



lean, mean, filler-free company the previously unreleased Bigger and Respect sound merely workmanlike, shadows wisdom: "The meek shall inherit the earth but don't forget/The poor are the ones who inherit the debt."

Andy Cowan

tune is a dynamic collision of funk and soul driven by Jimmy Vinson's dancing flute lines. Vinson is the soundtrack's star, switching to sax on the earthy blues shuffle, My Favorite Beer Joint.

Charles Waring

## Various

★★★★★

Too Far Out

CHERRY RED/TEA CHEST TAPES. CD

Subtitled: Beat, Mod & R&B From 304 Holloway Road (1963-1966).



Joe Meek's recordings at the dawn of Beatlemania through psychedelia's mid-'60s snapshot. The producer's obsession with pushing pop's sonic possibilities provides a soundtrack to the decade's experimental mood, captured on his series of what are now considered freakbeat classics: Crawdaddy Simone by The Syndicats; You're Holding Me Down by The Buzz and Paul & Ritchie & The Crying Shames' Come On Back. Each one a menacing outsider anthem with fraught, R&B guitar. There are equally astonishing finds among the umpteenth newly unearthed tracks here. A savage cover of Bo Diddley's Pretty Thing from The Classics, an R&B group from Gospel featuring future members of Simon Dupree & The Big Sound, The Falcons' fuzzed-up

I'm Gonna Fight For You and The Impac's Hold The Door – for which the producer went full-on kaleidoscopic – to name but a few.

Lois Wilson

## Various

★★★★★

The Elvis Presley Connection Vol. 4

BEAR FAMILY. CD

Expertly-compiled selection of songs covered by Elvis from 1967-69.



This latest entry in Bear Family's chronological series examining the songs covered by Elvis during his career reaches the time of his late-1960s re-emergence and the '68 Comeback Special. Inspirations for the latter broadcast are represented here by Rufus Thomas's original Sun Studios version of Tiger Man, Jerry Reed's Guitar Man, and two cuts of Big Boss Man – the Jimmy Reed original and Charlie Rich's blistering up-tempo rendition. Other highlights include Mac Davis's 1971 recording of his own A Little Less Conversation – a song he originally pitched at Aretha Franklin – and Fred Mick & The Kingsmen in 1962 drowning in a sea of reverb on their only disc, a fine, loose-as-a-geese reading of Baby, What You Want Me To Do. Many are standout recordings in their own right, but the collection also firmly

reinforces what a superb interpreter of songs Elvis was throughout his career.

Max Décharné

## Ffa Coffi Pawb

★★★★★

Dalec Pelion

ARA DEG. CD/DL LP

Cult Welsh quartet's 1988, originally cassette-only, debut gets a spruce-up.



Crammed with grainy '80s footage, the recently BBC iPlayer-screened documentary Ffa Coffi Pawb! was a wonderful evocation of Gruff Rhys and Dafydd Iwan's Thatcherism-blighted non-adventures in Bethesda, Wales prior to FCP mutating into Super Furry Animals. Already teamed with producer Gorwel Owen and signed to headstrong DIY label Ankst, FCP distilled powerpop, Krautrock and glam into a rudimentary, drum machine-driven stramash with great tunes (Mynd I Lawr; Nyth). If Dalec Pelion is shot through with irreverence, it figures. Phonetically, at least, Ffa Coffi Pawb translates from the Welsh as "fuck off, everyone", yet for all its rough edges the group's music is audibly the seed for SFA's melodious psych. Former Flaming Lips drummer and FCP archivist Kliph Scurlock has remastered Dalec Pelion; a reissue of second FCP LP *Clymhallia* is coming, too.

James McNair





Sweet inspiration: Paul Weller has his fuse lit by The Joneses (above).

## Various

★★★★★

### Paul Weller Presents That Sweet, Sweet Music

ACE, CD/DLP

Weller's soul music mixtape also serves as musical autobiography.

WELLER DISCOVERED 1962's Spanish Twist, a little known instrumental by The IB Special on the flip of The Isley Brothers' Twist And Shout via The Beatles' cover, when he was first learning guitar. He bought Jon Lucien's transcendent 1971 7-inch Search For The Inner Self for £70 from Leicester's Boogaloo Records at the inception of his solo career when all musical blinkers were off. Both feature on this journey-through-soul compilation that's thoroughly enjoyable, but insightful and celebratory too. Weller fans will no doubt be aware of his championing of The Dells' Run For Cover, a 1966 Northern soul dancer on Chess, but perhaps less so of James Carr's Pouring Water On A Drowning Man from the same year, an emotionally up-ending ballad and recent recommendation from Weller bassist Jake Fletcher. Proof that, to paraphrase one of his lyrics, music continues to light the fuse.

Lois Wilson



## Lee 'Scratch' Perry And Friends

★★★★★

Land Of Kinks  
DOCTOR BIRD, CD

Rare instrumentals, proto-dubs and funky deejay cuts.



After the belated 1969 UK chart success of Return Of Django, an instrumental adaptation of Chris Kenner's Sick And Tired used in a Cadbury's television advert, Lee 'Scratch' Perry began concentrating on stripped-down organ instrumentals and raucous toasting sides, with funk and soul supplanting earlier rhythm and blues influences. This 2-CD compilation gathers obscure singles from 1970 and unreleased alternates lifted from vintage master tapes. Oddball instrumentals such as Ferry Boat, Blood Poison and Peck It are decidedly uncommercial and U Roy's OK Corral a soundsystem special; one-off adaptations of Wilson Pickett's Mr Pitiful, Eddie Floyd's Please Consider Me, Steam's Na Na Hey Hey Kiss Him Goodbye and The Beatles' Let It Be are equally left-field. And an off-kilter take of The Coasters' Yakety Yak becomes the launching pad for inventive audio cut-ups The Tackro and Kill Them All.

David Katz



## Wings

★★★★★

Venus And Mars

MPL/UME, DL/LP

50th anniversary half-speed vinyl master of fourth Wings outing.

Goodbye Henry McCullough and Denny Seiwell, hello Jimmy McCulloch and drummers Geoff Britton then Joe English, as our happy couple and sidekick Denny Laine rove between Nashville, London, New Orleans and LA, trying to balance Macca's dominant creativity with his nostalgic yearning for band democracy. Faced with following the success of *Band On The Run* with new sidekicks, McCartney clearly focuses on riffastic tunes that juggle his melodic gifts and pop smarts with the desire to rock out. Retro glam stomper Rock Show is a pounding scene-setter for both LP and the looming Wings Over The World tour, big on harmonies and rockin' piano, while Letting Go remains in the set today, all taut guitars and stacked harmonies. Although remastered in 2014, this latest edition returns to the original

tapes with a bright and loving clarity that underlines an abiding sense of an album put together on the hoof, eager to please and perhaps a tad loose on editorial rigour.

Mark Cooper

## Unrest

★★★★★

Perfect Teeth

4AD, CD/DL/LP

30th anniversary reissue of US indie-rock gem includes LP of rarities.



Though their earlier clatter won comparison to fellow Washington, DC noise punks Pussy Galore, by the time Unrest recorded valedictory album *Perfect Teeth*, their sound had evolved into an eclectic, unpredictable spree. Their minimalist pop – stretching from their deliriously scratchy tribute to Mancunian indie perennial Cath Carroll (whose Robert Mapplethorpe portrait graces the cover) to the terse, Velvets-y chug of Make Out Club – pares away anything inessential. That keeps the focus on frontman Mark Robinson's yearning, romantic vocal and deliciously trebly, razor-edged guitar, while his harmonies with bassist Bridget Cross on Breath XOXO sweeten the song's bruised proto-slowcore glide. An extra LP of rarities, meanwhile, rescues from obscurity B-side treasures like the New Order-esque

mope of So Sick and the joyful calypso of Capezio Bowler. Still the sound of a band with seemingly inexhaustible potential, *Perfect Teeth* saw Unrest going out at their best.

Stevie Chick

## The GPs

★★★★★

In 1981 There Was...

TALKING ELEPHANT, CD

RT and RM's brief n'r side-hustle lives again.



Sappy record nerds before they helped to birth British folk rock, Richard Thompson and Ralph McTell roped in Fairport Convention alumni Dave Pegg and Dave Mattacks for a spin through their record collections in 1981. The GPs played just six shows (plus a brief Cropredy reunion in 1997) with this new set a tidied up and lightly expanded retake of 1991's lo-fi *Saturday Rolling Around*, which was culled from wobbly live tapes. Debts are paid to Bob Dylan (McTell's Zimmerman Blues and Thompson's angsty Going Gone) as well as Eddie Cochran, The Band and Smokey Robinson, though Thompson enthusiasts may be more interested in a version of You're Going To Need Somebody from 1979's under-loved *Sunnivista*. His take on Lady Miss Clawdy, meanwhile, is a reminder that there is at least as much drape-jacketed rockabilly as

folk in Thompson's musical DNA. Inessential but fun.

Jim Wirth

## S.Y.P.H.

★★★★★

Pst!

TAPETE, CD/DL/LP

Punk meets Krautrock, recorded at Can's Inner Space studio.



While at school, Uwe Jahnke and Harry Rag founded probably the first Can fan club in Germany. They interviewed bassist Holger Czukay in 1976, and he produced S.Y.P.H.'s second LP, *Pst!*, in 1980. On Einsam In Wein (Lustlos), the fuzz guitar and on-off bass over mantric drumming owes much to Can, while the scratchy, minimal strumming on Moderne Romantik owes more to Faust. The punk part comes out in their raw approach and Rag's singing is rather wearing at times, like a shouty cross between D.A.F.'s Gaby Delgado and Plastic Bertrand. Do The Fleischwurst is typically uneven and endearingly chaotic with Czukay parping along on French horn over disco bass and martial drumming. On Nachbar, the gently pulsing bass and drums and field recordings show a different approach and points towards 1981's *S.Y.P.H.* (album four), which is more thoughtful and focused.

Mike Barnes

## Ernie Graham

★★★★★

Ernie Graham

ESOTERIC, CD/DL

Smoker's delight: high times for foundation pub rocker.



Not long before his death in 2001, Ernie Graham revealed that he wrote Sebastian – the intensely homoerotic opener on his lone solo LP – in exchange for "a couple of pounds of Leb" from a London hash dealer. Not taking things too seriously after a stressful spell fronting Jimi Hendrix-produced Eire Apparent, the Northern Irishman moved in with Brinsley Schwarz and Help Yourself, who delivered *Music From Big Pink* vibes on this mellow, lovelorn 1971 album. The Girl That Turned The Lever and So Lonely have languid sparkle aplenty, while raggle-taggle closer Belfast surveys the Troubles overtaking in his home city. Graham went on to make two albums with Clancy and a one-off single for Stiff and was apparently a steward aboard the Orient Express later in life. This period piece catches him at his relaxed best, though. Roll up, roll up.

Jim Wirth



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Bright young things:  
Sunhouse (from left)  
Paul Bacon, Rob Brooks  
and Gavin Clark.

## CREDITS

**Tracks:** Crazy On The Weekend/  
Hurricane/Chasing The Dream/Spinning Round The Sun/  
Good Day To Die/  
Lips/Loud Crowd/  
Monkey Dead/Hard Sun/Swing Low/  
Animal/Second Coming

**Personnel:** Gavin Clark (vocals), Paul Bacon (guitars), Rob Brooks (bass), John Reynolds (drums), Carol Isaacs (piano, accordion), Mark Taylor (Hammond organ), Caroline Dale (strings), Joan Diver (backing vocals), Sinéad O'Connor (backing vocals), Screaming Orphans (backing vocals)

**Producer:** John Reynolds

**Released:** 1998

**Recorded:** Ghost Rooms, London

**Current availability:** 2025 reissue, Rough Trade DL/LP

O'Connor delivered uncredited backing vocals on the bitter *Hard Sun*). "He'd stick down a guide vocal and a guide acoustic guitar and he'd go away and basically come back to a finished track," says Brooks. "He was happy to trust us."

His faith was well placed. Subtly embellished with piano and strings, *Crazy On The Weekend* finds the silver linings at the edge of Clark's black clouds, Chasing The Dream and Spinning Round The Sun marking the brightest points of Sunhouse's Northern Sky. Loud Crowd, Monkey Dead and the furious Animal focus clearly on Clark's troubles – chemical and otherwise – but the luscious Lips posits his wife's love as the most intoxicating drug of all. "Your touch on my flesh is more exciting to me than any fortune or fame that might come my way," sings Clark.

*Crazy On The Weekend* chimed in well with the post-Britpop comedown (it was 15th in MOJO's end-of-year poll for 1998) but fame and fortune were more problematic for Sunhouse. They supported the likes of Bernard Butler and The Unbelievable Truth, but Clark did not enjoy performing, and while demos were made for a second Sunhouse LP, the singer bucked. "I lost it really," he told Meadows in 2007. "I was just a complete nutjob."

Brooks is diplomatic when it comes to explaining what happened to Clark ("he had demons, we all do") and feels that, in any case, a follow-up album would have taken Sunhouse to a level of success the singer would have struggled to handle. "It was going to completely blow up if we had carried on," he says. "That would have finished Gavin or the band anyway."

As it was, Clark persevered under the radar; he continued recording for Meadows' films, contributed to James Lavelle's *UNKLE* project, and produced a clutch of records with Clayhill and solo before dying of alcohol-related causes aged 46.

Brooks lost touch with his bandmate after Sunhouse split, but after listening to the cleaned up version of *Crazy On The Weekend* set to be released by Rough Trade, he is sure he and Bacon helped Clark produce his best work. "There's sadness and lots of stuff inter-

twined in it but we thought the world of each other," he says.

"My songs are a reflection of the world as I see it, and the world as I see it is often dark but not hell," said Clark later in life. His shuddering unease is the core of *Crazy On The Weekend* ("My soul's an open grave, I got venom in my head," he sings on the grisly *Swing Low*), but bleak as it is, it is also a testament to the redeeming power of love, and his bandmates bringing out the grace in these wounded songs. Haunted, damaged, Clark proved too fragile to thrive centre-stage, but here – however briefly – his future looked bright.

Jim Wirth

# Blinded By The Light

This month's rock'n'roll salvage: acoustic-electric Midlands folk blues, painfully exposed.

## Sunhouse

### Crazy On The Weekend

INDEPENDIENTE, 1998

**D**ISINTEGRATING UNDER the pressure of performing in his own home in Shane Meadows' troubling 2007 biopic *The Living Room*, Gavin Clark apologises to the tiny invited audience – including his wife and three of his five children. Trembling and so nervous that he cannot feel his hands, he jokes awkwardly: "I fried my head on drugs when I was younger and it's turned me into Shakin' Stevens."

An unguarded writer with a voice like a charity shop trumpet, Clark made for ripples after songs documenting his chemical misadventures soundtracked Meadows' breakthrough films, *Small Time* (1996) and *Twenty Four Seven* (1997). His luminous debut with Sunhouse – a trio formed with guitarist Paul Bacon and bassist Rob Brooks – had him cast as a hard-scrabble Nick Drake, a parallel that would dog him until his death in 2015.

On *Crazy On The Weekend*'s spindly title track, Clark channels Jackson C Frank's mournful Blues Run The Game as he shudders at the possibility that he might escape his chilly little rut. "Dream, dream, think I'm going to be somebody," he sings. "Feels like I'm losing

my way." Riven with self-doubt, he perhaps always felt his natural place was on the margins. "He was genuinely humble and quite a shy guy," Brooks tells MOJO. "He never wanted to be the focus of attention."

Following his father's death, the teenage Clark turned to the guitar and self-medication to deal with his grief, a process he alluded to in Sunhouse's *Good Day To Die*. Midlands auteur Meadows met Clark in the early 1990s while they were working at the Alton Towers theme park in Staffordshire (Meadows did face painting, Clark made chips), and was flattened by the self-effacing Londoner's songwriting.

Meadows helped to recruit the members of Sunhouse (named partly in honour of the Sunrise Chinese takeaway in Burton-on-Trent) to make music for his films, but their focus shifted to fully realising Clark's work after they signed to the Independent label. "Gavin was amazing," says Brooks. "Obviously a brilliant songwriter, wonderful vocals, but as a musician he was quite naive."

Clark took a back seat when Sunhouse went to London to record *Crazy On The Weekend* at the west London home studio of producer John Reynolds (whose ex-wife Sinéad



"I lost it really... I was just a complete nutjob."

DAVID CLARK



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**Kings of mettle:** Led Zeppelin flying high (from left) Robert Plant, John Paul Jones, John Bonham, Jimmy Page.



## 10 Led Zeppelin Celebration Day

ATLANTIC/SWAN SONG, 2012

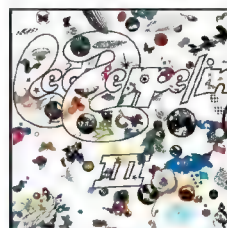
**You say:** "Amazing that they pulled it off. I would have killed for a ticket!" **Lennox Orr, via X**

There was nothing risk-averse about Led Zeppelin's 2007 reunion show in memory of Ahmet Ertegun. Indeed, with Plant unpersuadable re further gigs, their reputation came to rest on its for-one-night-only bravado. A fracture to Page's pinky necessitated postponing for a fortnight, but Valhalla was breached and Zeppelin triumphed. Kashmir sounds Olympian, Dazed And Confused stretches old improv muscles, and Stairway To Heaven – previously tarnished by duff airings at Live Aid and an Atlantic Records' 40th birthday bash – regains its rightful place in the firmament. Through it all, Jason Bonham drums up a storm worthy of his late father in emotionally testing circumstances. Avoiding the A-listers-swamped aftershow, Plant repaired to his local kebab house for humus/reflection.



### CAST YOUR VOTES...

This month you chose your Top 10 Led Zeppelin LPs. Next month we want your 'drone' Top 10. Send selections via X, Facebook, Bluesky, Instagram or e-mail to [mojo@bauermedia.co.uk](mailto:mojo@bauermedia.co.uk) with the subject 'How To Buy Drone' and we'll print the best comments.



## 4 Led Zeppelin III

ATLANTIC, 1970

**You say:** "A fascinating development forward from the first two records." **James Muro, via Facebook**

"We can't relax because of people from Nagoya turning up to ask about Bron-Yr-Aur Stomp," the owners of Bron-Yr-Aur cottage wrote Robert Plant in 2001. It was there, in Snowdonia, Wales, sans electricity, that he and Page wrote acoustic gems such as That's The Way and Friends, Page's inspired use of open-tunings bringing a hypnotic, raga-ish quality to the latter. *Led Zeppelin III*'s bucolic, mostly gentler quality came to define it in the public imagination, but when the group decamped to Headley Grange, Hampshire, en masse with the Rolling Stones Mobile in tow, Immigrant Song's punishing nod to Norse myth would contrast sharply with Tangerine's wistful dandelion-clock idyll. All this plus Since I've Been Loving You's transcendent, squeaky kick-pedal blues.

# Led Zeppelin

To be a rock and not to roll.  
By James McNair.

**I** SA VISIONARY too strong? Certainly Jimmy Page had vision. In July 1968, when an LA psalmist told him of imminent "life changing" decisions just days before his then-bandmates called time on The Yardbirds, the guitarist was already conceptualising a supergroup who – after a brief spell as The New Yardbirds – would be named Led Zeppelin as per Keith Moon's suggestion.

Singles? Only very rarely. Studio recordings? They'd self-finance them, creating a bargaining chip when Jerry Wexler signed them to Atlantic. Zeppelin's explosive, eclectic music would tap studio techniques Page had gleaned from recording engineers while working as a session musician, and US DJs would be encouraged to broadcast the magic one side of vinyl at a time. That way, epics such as Dazed And Confused could cast their spell.

Naturally, the line-up was crucial. A golden god on vocals – albeit a homeless one who'd been goofing around in blues/covers act Obs-Tweedle until Page and his manager Peter Grant scouted Robert Plant's primal wail in Walsall. Plant assured them there was no finer drummer than his Black Country wingman/former Band Of Joy bandmate John Bonham, while John Paul Jones – a multi-instrumentalist/arranger/trusted session confrère of Jimmy's on the Shirley Bassey-piloted Goldfinger and more – was a shoo-in bassist after his wife Mo urged him to feel Page out re his new group.

America swooned first. The early live shows were lightning unbottled, even if they opened for Moby Grape to half-empty houses. Then, between

1969–1971, four groundbreaking, earthshaking LPs arrived so thick and fast they didn't have titles, only numbers. By 1973's *Houses Of The Holy* Zeppelin had added reggae and taut funk to their lusty riffage and rustic, sometimes Eastern-flavoured folk, Plant skirting around James Brown's famed exhortations to "Take it to the bridge!" on the lovingly indebted The Crunge.

Ultimately Led Zeppelin were a bit like their airship namesake: too huge, idiosyncratic and vulnerable to disaster to stay aloft indefinitely. Each member's mojo was so crucial, that, in 1980, when John Bonham died aged 32 at Page's home in Clewer, Windsor, after a marathon vodka binge, a devastated Page, Plant and Jones instantly disbanded.

Though the accruing, multi-faceted darkness and tragic losses which cast shadow on the band's peerless music might partly explain why Bernard MacMahon's thrilling 2025 documentary *Becoming Led Zeppelin* is an origin-story, not an overview, there were eventually moments of healing, too.

In 2012, when the group's three surviving members received the Kennedy Center Honors from President Obama and Heart's Anne & Nancy Wilson, John Bonham's son Jason and a gospel choir performed

Stairway To Heaven at the gala, Plant in particular was visibly moved. "For years we'd had these carbon copy media cheap shots fired at us," he told this writer in 2014. "It was great to see the Wilson sisters and Jason cut through all that."

"Four earth-shaking LPs arrived so fast they didn't have titles."





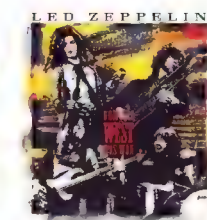
## 9 Led Zeppelin

### In Through The Out Door

SWAN SONG, 1979

**You say:** "Band relations weren't good, but still a very decent album. Love Jimmy's guitar fills on *All My Love*." Phillip Young, via e-mail

Hatched at ABBA's Polar studios, Zeppelin's swan song (bar outtakes set *Coda*) was largely The Percy and Jonesy Show. Still battling heroin addiction, Page contributed less than usual, hence six Plant/Jones co-writes in which the latter's piano and Yamaha GX-1 synth often star. In *The Evening* packs the old swagger, Page using a miked stand as a slide during his rambunctious solo, but much of *ITTOD* shreds the blueprint. With talk of Plant's "old blue dungarees", rockabilly/bluegrass knees-up *Hot Dog* is maybe a wheeze too far, but *Fool In The Rain*, with magnificent Bonham shuffle and joyous samba interlude, is wonderful. *All My Love*, Plant's elegy for his late son Karac, also shines on a Zep LP like no other.



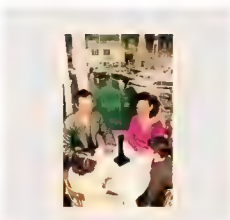
## 8 Led Zeppelin

### How The West Was Won

ATLANTIC, 2003

**You say:** "A 25-minute *Dazed And Confused* shouldn't work, but really does. Better than *The Song Remains The Same*." Stuart Joslin, via e-mail

Page's 2000 tour/concert LP with The Black Crowes energised him, so he and *Live At The Greek* producer Kevin Shirley turned to the refurbishment of two near-mythic bootlegged Zeppelin shows at the LA Forum and Long Beach Arena in June 1972. By Page's estimation, these dates were exemplary, and this – the double-live LP *The Song Remains The Same* could have been – bears testament. A ferocious Immigrant Song and three box-fresh picks from upcoming fifth album *Houses Of The Holy* (The Ocean; Dancing Days; Over The Hills And Far Away) all thrill, while Plant shouts out to Joni Mitchell on *Going To California*. The British Invasion at its most awe-inspiringly comprehensive.



## 7 Led Zeppelin

### Presence

SWAN SONG, 1976

**You say:** "Scintillating! Their most hard-hitting record." Martin Högvall, via e-mail

An energised, often funky outlier – witness *Royal Orleans* and *For Your Life* transmute space into groove – *Presence* also has Achilles Last Stand, a thunderous canter whose unnerving intensity seems remarkable given Plant sang it in a wheelchair while recovering from a car crash on Rhodes. The accident had nixed touring plans, bringing Page and Plant together to write spontaneously in Malibu, California, before recording *Presence* in Munich. Tea For One is Since I've Been Loving You's poor cousin, but Nobody's Fault But Mine's phased Willie Dixon-plundering call-and-response has real sass and heft. Hipgnosis's cover-art use of a mysterious black obelisk in kitsch, wholesome settings also resonated; *Presence*'s druggy, sometimes seedy underbelly signalled encroaching darkness.



## 6 Led Zeppelin

### Led Zeppelin

ATLANTIC, 1969

**You say:** "Just blew me away. I wore out my first copy and had to buy another." Jerry McGuire, via Facebook

The US press had heralded "the next supergroup" prior to *Led Zeppelin*'s release. No pressure, then. *Good Times* *Bad Times* opens with showboating brio, while Zep sound suitably hungry, almost feral on short sharp shock Communication Breakdown, Plant's vocals urgent and electrifying. Their palette was already broad, Jones's ecclesiastical Hammond opening *Your Time Is Gonna Come*, and Page performing his Bert Jansch-indebted take on *Black Mountain Side* backed by tabla player Viram Jasani. By July, Zeppelin had their first US gold record. Not bad for an album tracked and mixed in nine days for £1,782. Baroness Eva Von Zeppelin sent no congratulatory telegram. Zeppelin, she claimed, were "shrieking monkeys" who besmirched her family's name.



## 5 Led Zeppelin

### Houses Of The Holy

ATLANTIC, 1973

**You say:** "Acoustic beauty to cod reggae to fractured funk. I love the diversity." Mike Bennett, via Bluesky

In which *No Quarter*, Zeppelin's spookiest song, vies with *The Rain Song*, one of their prettiest and most chordally complex. The studio itself was becoming more of an instrument, lending an almost prog-rock quality to multi-guitar-overdubbed opener *The Song Remains The Same*, and seeing Jones overdub mellotron, piano and synth. "They're just a giggle, they're just two send-ups," Page told the NME when they dished reggae offering *D'er Mak'er* and funk pastiche *The Crunge*, but Zeppelin shone even at play. Elsewhere, *Dancing Days* finds Zeppelin's fabulous rhythm section functioning as one, and *The Ocean*'s a cappella vocal interlude and climactic coda are not to be missed. Shall we talk about the cover art? No, let's not.



## 3 Led Zeppelin

### Led Zeppelin II

ATLANTIC, 1969

**You say:** "My older brother bought it when it came out and I heard it so much I had it memorised!" Treatment Bound, via Bluesky

Recorded in various locations against a backdrop of near-relentless touring, *II* sees Page emerge as the riff-writer par excellence. Outwith its organic, Theremin-imbued middle section, *Whole Lotta Love* makes an artform of simplicity, while *Heartbreaker* invites all comers to strut, not walk. Alongside *The Lemon Song*'s oversexed blues, Zeppelin's *Black Country* contingent brought songs for their better halves. Plant's *Thank You*, the best of the group's early ballads, was for wife Maureen, while *Moby Dick*, partly a Bonham drum solo, was later renamed *Pat's Delight* in honour of his missus. Zeppelin were a band on the run recording in multiple studios, yet *II* had genius to spare. A Number 1 on both sides of the Atlantic.



## 2 Led Zeppelin

### Led Zeppelin IV

ATLANTIC, 1971

**You say:** "Black Dog was the first Zeppelin song I ever heard – instantly hooked!" Alison Eavis, via e-mail

Ubiquitous; fabled; charged with satanic backmasking, *Stairway To Heaven* will always be the focal point of Zeppelin's magnum opus. But *IV*'s colossal sales and mythic status depend on so much more. Witness *Sandy Denny*, immortalised and gaining the reach she deserved on *The Battle Of Evermore*; *Black Dog*'s extraordinarily elastic riffage and *When The Levee Breaks*' mammoth, endlessly-sampled backbeat. Flak for *III*'s lighter touch didn't cow Zeppelin. They became more resolute, even withholding *IV*'s masters until Atlantic, freaked by the idea, sanctioned a front sleeve with no mention of the band's name. Regardless, the inner-sleeve symbols representing each band member were inked on school books from Heston to Haight Ashbury. Behold: the sway of mystique.



## 1 Led Zeppelin

### Physical Graffiti

SWAN SONG, 1975

**You say:** "Universally acknowledged by the hard rock fraternity as one of the greatest of all time." DC Neath, via e-mail

A tour-burnt Jones had told Peter Grant he wanted to quit and become Winchester Cathedral's choirmaster, but Zeppelin rallied and then some back at Headley Grange. Upscaling the grandeur, their double-set tour de force has three exemplary epics: Page's magnificent guitar-orchestration *Ten Years Gone*; Kashmir, seismic and hulking enough to soundtrack 1998's *Godzilla* when Puff Daddy sampled it on *Come With Me*; and the Jones-led paragon of synth-drone mysticism *In The Light*. A happening with Stones pianist Ian Stewart (*Boogie With Stu*), *Trampled Underfoot*'s funky clavinet and breathless riff *The Wanton Song* also shine alongside easeful, feel-personified ballad *Down By The Seaside*. An audacious undertaking of which Zeppelin were especially – and justifiably – proud.

## NOW DIG THIS

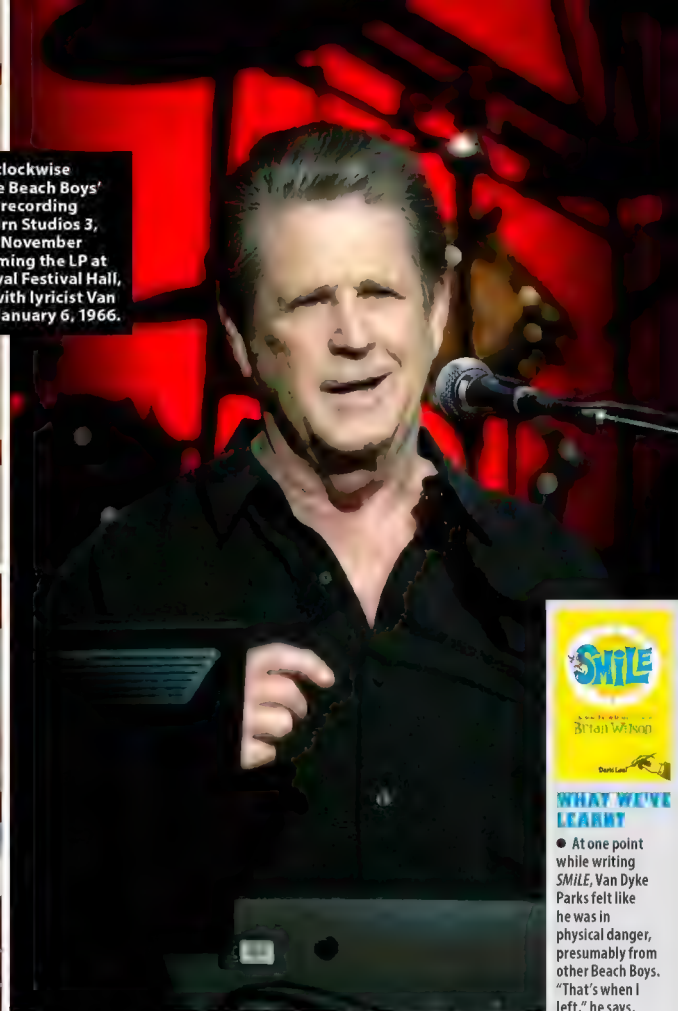


"Nobody mentions [us] floundering across the Atlas Mountains with a Nakamichi tape-machine recording Berber tribeswomen," reflected Robert Plant in 2014, referencing one of his and Page's early odysseys. Recorded live for MTV, largely in Morocco, 1994's *No Quarter: Jimmy Page & Robert Plant Unledded* was the logical apex of their ethnomusicological quest. Featuring an Egyptian ensemble and musicians from Marrakesh alongside The London Metropolitan Orchestra, it brought microtonal beauty and desert blues percussion to Zeppelin classics such as *Friends* and *The Battle Of Evermore*. Najma Akhtar's vocal ornamentations as she duets with Plant on the latter are truly spectacular, while Kashmir, incorporating everything from a call-to-prayer-like section to a few bars of *Black Dog*, brings the house down.





Vibrate on: (clockwise from left) The Beach Boys' Brian Wilson recording *SMiLE*, Western Studios 3, Los Angeles, November 1966; performing the LP at London's Royal Festival Hall, 2004; Brian with lyricist Van Dyke Parks, January 6, 1966.



#### WHAT WE'VE LEARN'T

- At one point while writing *SMiLE*, Van Dyke Parks felt like he was in physical danger, presumably from other Beach Boys. "That's when I left," he says.
- One bootleg version of *SMiLE* included a Miles Davis performance that many fans long thought was a Wilson composition.
- Before the fourth Royal Festival Hall show, Paul McCartney showed up at Wilson's door, playing ukulele; he then played with the band.
- Sound engineer Richie Davis used nine vocal mikes to render the shows' harmonies. "I kind of felt like a conductor of an orchestra," he says.

# The last laugh

An exhaustive oral history graced by a friend's loving touch.  
By Grayson Haver Currin.

## SMiLE: The Rise, Fall, And Resurrection Of Brian Wilson

★★★★★  
David Leaf

OMNIBUS PRESS. £25

"SEE, DEBBIE," Eva Easton-Leaf tells a friend at the start of an essay in her husband's oral history of Brian Wilson's reconstruction of and through *SMiLE*, "you can love someone enough." Easton-Leaf and her longtime friend and former roommate, Debbie Keil-Leavitt, are sharing a bottle of champagne, soon after the world premiere of Wilson's 37-year-old "teenage symphony to god" in 2004. Keil-Leavitt was a steadfast confidant to Wilson during the '70s, after he'd dropped *SMiLE* to save his family band from the alleged terror of his artistic ambition and vision. David Leaf was a Wilson devotee who married Keil-Leavitt's roommate and spent decades wondering to Wilson, insistently if carefully, "What happened to *SMiLE*?" That little scene, then, is the culmination of a few dozen people's love for Wilson, who stared down the most troubling period of

his career to finally perform his masterpiece—with a lot of help from a lot of friends.

*SMiLE: The Rise, Fall, And Resurrection Of Brian Wilson* is Leaf's obsessive oral history of that famous slow-motion triumph. Nearly 40 decades after his first Wilson biography, Leaf's bank of sources is voluminous and mostly complete—from Brian Wilson's childhood best friend to Carl Wilson's first wife, from record label heads to the musicians that methodically helped Wilson reimagine *SMiLE* from mislaid studio scraps.

Leaf first told this particular story in 2004 with the documentary *Beautiful Dreamer*, a less-detailed chronicle of the path toward that first show. Two decades later, this book not only addresses the subsequent album version (and, briefly, the box set) but also its lingering legacy and legal squabbles. What's more, Leaf repeatedly hands the pen to friends, fans, and fellow Wilson biographers, asking them for their own *SMiLE* story. The result is both generous in fact and spirit, leaving almost no detail unaddressed or laurel unawarded. This is, after all, the close of a quest that shaped Leaf's life as filmmaker, biographer, and Wilson confidant and champion.

However altruistic Leaf's approach can be, it does render a book that is repetitive. His twin senses of completion and inclusion mean that so many

people revisit the same lines, whether praising Wilson's genius (a word that appears three-dozen times here) or sharing how they found *SMiLE*, a tale that comes in approximately three varieties. It is a compendium of encounters and enthusiasms, then, with few filters or judgements. Still, the sharp memories and hilarious aphorisms of Van Dyke Parks and the musical insights of bandleader Darian Sahanaja make any repetition worthwhile. Never before has the picture around *SMiLE* been so complete.

"Nobody really does what they say they will," writes Beach Boys archivist Howie Edelson in one of several prologues. He's speaking specifically about his admiration for Leaf and his wherewithal in actually finding out what happened to *SMiLE* so long ago—and then doing everything he could to see it finally come to fruition. But the sentiment also applies to almost everyone in these pages, people who loved Wilson and his lost ark enough to help him do what he said he would do: construct his teenage symphony to God, even if it took him until his sixties.

"Never before has the picture around *SMiLE* been so complete."



# Sir Coxson Dodd: His Musical Mightiness

★★★★★

Jeremy Collingwood  
LICK IT BACK. £25

Lavish discography detailing Dodd's first six years.



Often referred to as Jamaica's Motown, Studio One is where most of the island's stars got their start,

including Bob Marley & The Wailers. This large-format illustrated discography begins with some background information on label founder Clement Dodd, as well as Skatalites trombonist Don Drummond, and then gets down to the nitty gritty of the 600 singles and handful of albums Dodd released between 1960-1966 – a staggering amount of excellent material for a man with no prior experience of music production. The discography is arranged by label with tons of label scans to drool over, the Gleaner archive clippings advertising live events and even a case of Dodd's dubplates being pilfered. The information relayed helps us to navigate Dodd's early output with minimal editorial glitches, giving a sense of the shift from rhythm and blues to ska and the overseas labels that brought the music to a broader audience.

David Katz

## Pressing News

★★★★★

Richard Morton Jack  
LANSLOWNE BOOKS. £80

Subtitled: *British Music As It Happened 1962-1972*; compendium of over 125 vintage press handouts and the coverage they inspired.



Richard Morton Jack is a chronicler who prefers the factual to the fanciful. Curious

then that he collects press releases, which exist somewhere between those poles. Designed to sell the ideal of an artist, they are notoriously unreliable source material. (Bill Fay's release here gets the name of his B-side wrong.) What these 'shout sheets' definitely tell you, however, is the story the public was sold at the time: John Lennon likes the colour black, steak and chips, and jelly; Brian Jones is "fascinated by railways"; three of the Small Faces are 5'5", the other is 5'4". You'd be surprised how much of the daft stuff put in a press release echoes forever more. To this day, The Zombies resent the brainy swots angle they were handed 60 years ago. Morton Jack has curated a bums museum from these ephemeral documents,

flanked by contemporary press cuttings they generated. It offers a version of the past that's almost certainly kidding itself, but is fascinating to revisit nonetheless.

Jim Irvin

# Men Of A Certain Age: My Encounters with Rock Royalty

★★★★★

Kate Mossman  
NINE EIGHT. £22

Mix of insightful interviews and memoir from the writer and broadcaster.



"I was drawn to him by his ageing vulnerability, his giant ego and his extreme oddness..."

Kate Mossman

is meeting Steve Perry of Journey, but the attraction could apply to a good number of the ageing rockers interviewed for profiles in *The Word* or *The New Statesman*. The writer, spurning the 1990s bands of her teens, hones in on the mature allure of Sting, Jon Bon Jovi, Jeff Beck or Tom Jones (surrounded by his "flaming wall of anecdote"). In colourful but insightful portraits she captures baby boomers still wedded to their craft, many evidently flattered at the attentions of a young woman. Those with careers in disarray – Terence Trent D'Arby or the shambolic, priapic Kevin Ayers – turn out to be far more intriguing than her former teen crush, Queen's level-headed Roger Taylor. Addictions, rivalries, dodgy hips and the demands of mega-fame are all pondered. As Mossman notes: "a successful band is a life sentence."

John Bungey

industry marketed her as a "bliss ninny", an image that forever associated the soul-barer with Woodstock and campfire singalongs. This book peels back the layers, showing how she used her often extraordinary music as both armour and weapon: the some-time Scientistologist played to get closer to her "theta", but "didn't play the music business game very well". Her dependence on her manager-husband, who left her in financial ruin, only complicated matters. All that aside, Melanie's sunny side still shines through.

Mark Paytress



# Heartbreaker: A Memoir

★★★★★

Mike Campbell with Ari Surdovall

CONSTABLE/GRAND CENTRAL. £25

The soft-spoken guitarist chronicles life and death in a great American band.

Late in *Heartbreaker*, Mike Campbell remembers paying Rick Rubin a studio visit during some of his final sessions with Johnny Cash. The guitarist was stunned to see Joe Strummer there. He confessed to Strummer the troubles of keeping his very famous band alongside Tom Petty going. "I told him – and it was rare for

me – how I was feeling." Campbell has always been the taciturn *Heartbreaker*, his words transubstantiated into the licks that helped define Petty's anthems. But he opens up in this vulnerable memoir, writing about supporting a superstar with commendable candour and all the unexpected opportunities it allowed, from sessions with Dylan to his rapport with another famously reserved guitarist, George Harrison. *Heartbreaker* immediately becomes an indispensable history of Campbell's band. More important, it is a stirring and tender portrait of a life realised through rock'n'roll.

Grayson Haver Currin

## Lollapalooza

★★★★★

Richard Bienstock & Tom Beaujour

ST MARTIN'S PRESS. £25

Rollicking oral history of Perry Farrell's Stateside touring bonanza.



Readers searching for the missing link between Lizzy Goodman's early-'00s bitch-fest, *Meet Me In The Bathroom*, and Bienstock and Beaujour's '80s hair-metal saga, *Nöthin' But A Good Time*, should grab this oral history, which evokes '90s alt-rock as colourfully as any book in print. Farrell, we learn, conceived 1991's inaugural pan-cultural Lollapalooza as his junk-sick headliners Jane's Addiction's farewell. Thus begins a tale of alt-idealism, but also terrifying drug hi-jinks, booking/logistical madness and backstage aggro. With unguarded testimony from A-listers like Nick Cave, mid-rehab in '94 ("We went into it not wanting to be there,

and it just got worse") right through to the Jim Rose Circus Sideshow's Amazing Mr Lifto ("Nailing my wiener to a board"), and dramas aplenty involving Green Day, Metallica, Billy Corgan ("A raging asshole," opines Wayne Coyne), Courtney Love and Nirvana (who ultimately never played), it's hugely entertaining.

Andrew Perry

# John & Paul: A Love Story In Songs

★★★★★

Ian Leslie

FABER & FABER. £25

Pop psychologist mines The Beatles' split personality.



It's hard to think of a partnership with greater impact on post-war culture (Nixon and Kissinger, maybe) than that of James

Paul McCartney and John Winston Lennon, and in a way, all Beatles books (or magazine articles) are about the dynamics of their relationship. Psychologist Ian Leslie is the author of *How To Disagree: Lessons On Productive Conflict At Work And Home* – which sounds like something The Beatles themselves would have benefited from reading (and wouldn't go amiss in the MOJO office either). Yet he refrains, for the most part, from fanciful speculation about his subjects' inner lives or feelings for one another, while his ear for the discrete threads of John and Paul in Beatle music, and their interaction, is excellent – peaking with an über-nerdy dive into the 'ahh's that link the sections of *A Day In The Life* ("Maybe the ahh is Paul impersonating John?"). Come in for the psychology, stay for the musicology, in other words.

Danny Eccleston

# The Musical Life Of Melanie: From The Village To Woodstock And Beyond

★★★★★

Craig Harris

ROWLMAN & LITTLEFIELD. £25

The late singer-songwriter's first serious biography.



Despite a flat title and no superfan Björk or Morrissey foreword, once inside, these pages reveal a quietly

compelling portrait of a misunderstood singer caught in the glare of fame's footlights. Taking her cues from Bessie Smith, Piaf and Holiday, young Melanie Safka from Queens, New York, cast herself as "a tragic figure". Her voice, raw and haunting, was likened to "a pencil scratch across the record". Yet the

Giving it the Vs: The Heartbreakers (from left) Mike Campbell, Ron Blair and Tom Petty, Hammersmith Odeon, London, May 15, 1977.





I want to take you higher: funk-soul revolutionary Sly Stone in action at the Harlem Cultural Festival, 1969; (left) director Questlove and producer Joseph Patel talk shop.



WHAT WE'VE LEARN'T

- Stone's junior college music professor, Dave Froehlich, encouraged him to leave school: "You don't need it any more."
- Stone produced and essentially arranged The Great Society's Someone To Love, the precursor to the Jefferson Airplane hit.
- Saxophonist Jerry Martini was the member who told Stone it was time to start playing. "If we do a band," Martini remembers saying, "we'll all be famous."
- Stand! Inspired Nile Rodgers when he was a subsection leader for the Black Panther Party.
- "Is that Rhythm Nation?" Janet Jackson asked when she walked into the studio to find Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis sampling Stone. They all agreed it was.

# Stone immaculate

Questlove questions the systems that destroyed a revolutionary star. By **Grayson Haver Currin**.

## Sly Lives! (AKA The Burden Of Black Genius)

★★★★★

Dir: Ahmir 'Questlove' Thompson

HULU/DISNEY+ 12

**L**ATE INTO Sly Lives!, Ahmir 'Questlove' Thompson's thoughtful documentary about the explosive brilliance of Sly Stone and the band he built, the drummer and filmmaker poses a provocative question to his assembled celebrities: "Is there a burden on black genius?" Nearly two hours earlier, the film begins with a fruitless quest to define that term before implicitly offering Stone as one possible answer: a charismatic multi-instrumental wonder who channelled the fractures and possibilities of the late '60s into anthems that recombined most everything. D'Angelo — who emerges as a kind of one-man Greek chorus, so crucial for Sly Lives! — is the first to answer: "You do have to do it for everyone, and everybody else's success rides on your success."

Thompson's film does not shy away from

such larger cultural vexations and social quandaries, be they racism, addiction, privilege, or mental health disorders. The basics of Stone's story, after all, can seem like the standard fare of rock star rise-and-fall: a spirited kid with religious roots slips into the psychedelic scene of San Francisco, builds a mighty band with flair and finesse, and then succumbs to the excesses of success but somehow survives to become a grinning grandfather. (Stone, 81, is not interviewed, but Thompson does use recent candid photos of him, proof that his smile still electrifies.) Thompson does not pretend there are easy answers or ready fixes but instead lets his worries unspool into the present, crossing out the eyes of black artists like Lauryn Hill and Dave Chappelle on-screen as Vernon Reid asks, "Who do you think you are? What do you think you're doing?" In 2025 in the United States, those points retain a cruel power — and afford Sly Lives! a bittersweet staying power.

Sly Lives! taps Thompson's deep roster, with the reclusive likes of D'Angelo and André 3000 joining George Clinton, Chaka Khan, and a half-dozen members of the Family Stone or Stone's actual family. Thompson deploys them not just to analyse Stone's story but also his revolutionary music, which slipped protest messages into irrepressible party an-

thems. Thompson lifts the curtains on the seemingly interminable takes of Everyday People, while Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis dig into the inner-workings of its hook after explaining the mechanics of the meter in Dance To The Music. Q-Tip and Thompson lean over a sampler, nodding their heads as they excise a Family Stone drum beat and explain how those rhythms became hip-hop's vertebrae. Sly Lives! plays for the heads as well as those simply looking for a story that's poignant and thoughtful.

"I hate to say it, but these white rock'n'rollers, the motherfuckers go out in style," D'Angelo says near the end, long after Q-Tip suggests that Stone and black stars like him never received the same reinventive leeway as, say, David Bowie. "They die in their tomato garden with their grandson, laughing and shit... That's what we're supposed to be doing."

Sly Lives! is a true celebration of the hybridised music Stone made and a relentless rebuke of the systems that then made him suffer for it. It is the rare music documentary with the vision to look beneath and around the sound, too.

"It is the rare music doc with the vision to look beneath and around the sound, too."



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Simple folk: Bill Fay in 2019 - humility informed his music throughout his life.



## THE LEGACY

**The album:** *Time Of The Last Persecution* (Deram, 1971)

**The sound:** After the widescreen approach of his debut, Fay hunkered down with a small, adventurous group led by free jazz guitarist Ray Russell, and recorded this remarkable LP in a day. Mobilised by the Kent State shootings in May 1970, Fay's visionary bent turned apocalyptic, and the sound intensified accordingly. *Pictures Of Adolf Again*, in particular, was a measured warning that fascism could return: "Assure as I sit here there will appear/Pictures of Adolf again."

# Standing Inside The Flame

A rediscovered songwriter of immense sensitivity, Bill Fay left us on February 22.

**A** DAY OR TWO after Bill Fay made his one return to the stage, in 2007, he called to tell me about how it had gone. Fay had turned up for a Wilco gig at the Shepherd's Bush Empire in London, where he encored with Jeff Tweedy on Be Not So Fearful, a gentle prayer of a song from his 1970 debut album.

Fay was touched by the kindness of Tweedy and Wilco, but mostly he wanted to talk about how he'd travelled to the venue by bus from his north London home. For the entire journey, he'd been transfixed by a ladybird that had hitched a lift on his jacket sleeve. It was a measure of Fay's boundless capacity for awe, for understanding the value of small epiphanies, and for how he carefully avoided discussions of his own brilliance. "There are miracles/Everywhere you go," as he sang on 2012's *Cosmic Concerto (Life Is People)*.

That sense of wonder permeated much of Fay's music, beginning with the songs he started writing in the mid-1960s, a boy from the London suburbs studying electronics at Bangor University. His demos found their way to Peter Eden, Donovan's former manager,

who produced Fay's Dylan-ish debut single in 1967. Some Good Advice was a meditation on single-mindedness, Zen-like in its simplification of how life could be lived: "If you want to ride a bike/Ride your bike, if you like." It was a message he persevered with for the rest of his life.

It took three years for Fay to release an album. 1970's *Bill Fay* was a more grandiose affair, its orch-pop closer in tone to Scott Walker or David Ackles, but the lyrics were more intimate than the arrangements signalled: tales of modest but profound British lives; of communing with nature in a different way to the prevailing hippy rhetoric. "I just kept looking at trees from the top deck of the bus," as he told MOJO's Andrew Male in 2012.

One of the players on that first album was jazz guitarist Ray Russell, who grew close to Fay both musically and intellectually, and it was Russell who would helm his extraordinary second album, 1971's *Time Of The Last Persecution*. Fay's appearance on the cover gave him an air of wild prophet, but for all his music's spiritual power, the record was not a success, and Decca dropped him. Fay spent the best part of the next four decades out of the public eye, working as a gardener and fruit-picker, quietly writing and recording songs

as a kind of devotional pursuit.

In the early 2000s, these songs started finally being released, most notably a collection called *Tomorrow Tomorrow And Tomorrow* that had been recorded in the late '70s and early '80s.

Fay's songwriting practice was a constant, often private imperative, with other collections – *From The Bottom Of An Old Grandfather Clock* (1966-1970 demos), and *Still Some Light* (1970-71 and

2009 demos) – beautifully unmediated representations of his art.

Nevertheless, it was heartening in 2012 when producer Joshua Henry finally cajoled Fay back into a studio to record a formal comeback, *Life Is People*. The album sensitively augmented Fay's piano songs, often melancholy in tone, but also imbued with an enduring gratitude at the miracles of life, and a faith that had only deepened over the decades.

Two more lovely albums – 2015's *Who Is The Sender?* and 2020's *Countless Branches* – followed, cementing Fay's reputation as one of the great British singer-songwriters of his time, finally receiving the kind of acclaim he had always deserved. Fay, though, remained a private man, at one remove from the music business: hugely touched by the love for his work, but content with his life as it was and untroubled by even the slightest desire for fame. In later years, Parkinson's stymied his piano-playing, but the songs kept coming – a consolation not just to himself, but to more people than perhaps he could ever comfortably grasp.

John Mulvey

Matthew Pam Thomas

"I just kept looking at trees from the top deck of the bus..."

BILL FAY



Transcendental elevation: Roberta Flack brought depth and dignity to songs regardless of genre.



## Roberta Flack

Killing us softly with song  
BORN 1937

LIKE NINA Simone a teenage prodigy classical musician who ranged across gospel, jazz, R&B, pop and Broadway, Roberta Flack invested a fascinating array of songs with her own complex, thoughtful personality. Though her voice was less richly grained and spirit less audibly troubled than the older star, she had no less a talent for flooring you with the shock of her summoning to the surface a song's latent depths and passions.

"There is no starlight in my eyes," she told *Hit Parader* in 1971. But unbeknownst to the then 34-year-old teacher-turned-Washington nightclub singer-pianist, superstardom was just around the corner. Hearing on the car radio her reinvention of Ewan MacColl's folk song *The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face* from 1969's *First Take*, Clint Eastwood used it for a romantic sequence in his directorial debut, *Play Misty For Me*, where he played a radio DJ; US radio DJs flocked to the movie and went crazy for the song. Likewise serendipitously, Flack discovered her second worldwide smash, *Killing Me Softly*, on a TWA in-flight audio sung by Lori Lieberman, transforming it into another tour de force of defences-down intimacy.

There would be so much more than those two classics. She formed a deep musical bond with her fellow Howard University alumnus Donny Hathaway, and from 1975 would venture poppily uptempo on her own account with her self-produced *Feel Like Makin' Love*.

She continued to record at her own pace, signing off with her Beatles covers set *Let It Be Roberta* in 2012. But, so often singing for the downcast and vulnerable, dignified reflection was her signature tempo, her mood the pure, cleansing solitude of the night, the music and her voice.

Mat Snow

## Mike Ratledge

Cerebral Soft Machine  
co-founder and  
keyboardist  
BORN 1942

AS SOFT Machine were setting out from Canterbury to become psychedelic heroes of the UK underground scene, a BBC man came to interview them. He was astonished that Mike Ratledge, with his degree in psychology and philosophy from Oxford, was playing electric organ "in a pop group".

But if performing started out as "just a game" for Ratledge, he was soon applying a fierce intellect and classical know-how to pioneering extended compositions as the band moved from the pop, Dada and whimsy of the Kevin Ayers

years towards a new rock-jazz fusion. With his dark glasses and thick moustache, Ratledge projected an air of inscrutable cool hunched over his Lowrey Holiday Deluxe organ. Hooking up a fuzz box, he aimed to conjure an onslaught of notes that rivalled the power of Jimi Hendrix, with whom Soft Machine toured America in 1968.

Many saw 1970 as a peak for Soft Machine, who appeared at the Proms ("by our standards it was a fairly duff gig") and released the fan favourite *Third*, much of the double album written by Ratledge.

He left the group in 1976, but today the umpteenth line-up still often feature Ratledge tunes. He began a new career writing soundtrack, advert and library music, and worked with Karl Jenkins, another Soft Machine alumnus, on the Welshman's choral smash *Adiemus: Songs Of Sanctuary*. In 1967 Ratledge married the American singer and actor Marsha Hunt when she had trouble getting a visa extension. They separated immediately but remained lifelong friends, with the husband apparently visiting every Easter.

John Bungey



Game theorist: Mike Ratledge with Soft Machine, 1975.





Cool + King Jerry Butler made some roge-cold-classics.

## Jerry Butler

The Ice Man of Soul

BORN 1929

A FOUNDER member – along with fellow Chicago church choir member Curtis Mayfield – of The Impressions, Jerry Butler (AKA The Ice Man) took the lead on their 1958 hit For Your Precious Love, but left the group shortly after for a solo career that kept him in the American charts over the course of the next 25 years. A warm-voiced baritone, he brought authority to the orchestral ballads (He Will Break Your Heart; Make It Easy On Yourself – The Walker Brothers were big fans) that bridged the gap between streetwise doo wop and sophisticated soul in the early '60s.

Initially signed to Vee-Jay, he had Top 10 successes with Let It Be Me and Moon River – it was his hit, but Andy Williams was asked to sing it at the 1962 Oscars ceremony, and Butler was thus written out of history. In 1968, he switched to Mercury, first teaming up with producers Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff for the albums *The Ice Man Cometh* and *Ice On Ice* – blueprints for the later Philadelphia International sound – then Donny Hathaway, before decamping for

Motown. Butler was also an accomplished writer, co-authoring I've Been Loving You Too Long (a hit for Otis Redding), Only The Strong Survive (Elvis Presley) and A Brand New Me (Dusty Springfield).

After the chart placings dried up in the mid-1980s, he abandoned music for public service. Like Mayfield, Butler, who was born to sharecroppers in Mississippi and raised in social housing on Chicago's North Side, had long been a voice in the city's fight for social justice. In 1985, he became a commissioner for Cook County, Illinois, serving for more than 30 years and receiving a share in excess of 80 per cent of the vote the final time he ran for re-election. He also chaired the Rhythm And Blues Foundation and presented music shows for public service television.

David Hutcheon

"Butler bridged the gap between streetwise doo wop and sophisticated soul."

## Jamie Muir

King Crimson  
percussionist

BORN 1945



WHEN PERCUSSIONIST Jamie Muir abruptly departed King Crimson in early 1973 after recording the totemic *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* – an LP he named

– he sent headman Robert Fripp a postcard. On the front: "All part of the rich tapestry of life." And, on the back: "Coo-ee. Jamie." Born in Edinburgh, Muir tried jazz trombone before his focus shifted to extemporisation and the drums. Moving to London, from 1968 to 1971 he played free jazz with Derek Bailey and Evan Parker in The Music Improvisation Company. Other projects included Boris, Assagai, and Sunship with Allan Holdsworth, before the call to join Crimson came in 1972. His was a brief but influential tenure: Fripp, in tribute, called him "a major, and continuing, influence on my thinking, not only musical. A wonderful and mysterious person." Afterwards, Muir spent time in a Buddhist monastery in Scotland before resuming music in 1980. Later credits included recordings with Bailey, Parker and ex-Crimson drummer Michael Giles; from the '90s, he concentrated on painting.

Ian Harrison

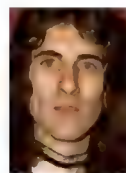
George's Rock Your Baby was a worldwide smash in 1974, Gwen's not entirely dissimilar Rockin' Chair went US Top 10 in 1975 (the duo's *Together* LP of that year contained another soundalike in I'll Do The Rockin'). The marriage ended in 1976. Gwen, who sang the first version of Always On My Mind to be released in 1972, had modest hits in the early '80s including Keep The Fire Burning and the widely sampled Funky Sensation, finding new audiences in Europe later that decade. Her vocals were sampled on Cassius's 1999 hit Feeling For You – Lady Gaga and Danger Mouse are among those who repurposed her tracks – and she also recorded gospel. She continued to perform until she suffered a stroke in 2012.

Clive Prior

## Sal Maida

Bass journeyman

BORN 1948



RAISED IN Little Italy in New York, The Beatles on Ed Sullivan sealed Salvatore Maida's fate. After playing with garage bands

Five Toes, he first set sail for London in 1969. A session with Smoke Stack Crumble, band of future Roxy Music drummer Paul Thompson, proved fortuitous. In 1973 Maida was back in Britain and a Roxy member for their *Stranded* Tour, though his tenure was short. In 1974, the bassist was back in NY and in thwarted cult pop-punks Milk 'N' Cookies. He would also play on Robert Calvert's Eno-produced *Lucky Leif And The Longships* in 1975, Sparks' hard rocking *Big Beat* in 1976 and Cherie Currie's '77 solo debut. Later he worked with Lisa Burns, Golden Carillo and Cracker, and with punk supergroup Osaka Popstar. The fondly-regarded Maida carried on gigging – his last band was The John Sally Ride – and published his memoir *Four Strings, Phony Proof, And 300 45s* in 2017.

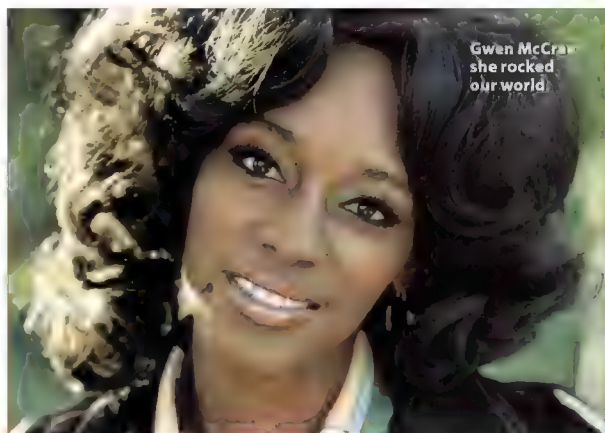
Ian Harrison

## Gwen McCrae

Soulful voice

BORN 1944

FLORIDA VOCALIST Gwen Mosley was performing locally when she met her husband George McCrae in 1963. After she joined his band The Jivin' Jets, they recorded late-'60s soul singles as George & Gwen, and sang backing vocals on early-'70s LPs including Bill Wyman's *Monkey Grip*. The married team found their biggest success apart: after



Gwen McCrae she rocked our world



## Colin Earl

Mungo Jerry, Foghat  
piano man

BORN 1942



INSPIRED BY Jerry Lee Lewis, London-born Colin Earl didn't begin learning piano until he was 21.

From 1967 he played with Ray Dorset in The Good Earth, who morphed into country-blues jug band Mungo Jerry in 1970 and immediately scored a worldwide Number 1 – and US Number 3 – with their good time debut 45 In The Summertime. After another Number 1 with Baby Jump and an early-'72 tour of the Far East, Earl and multi-instrumentalist Paul King split to form the King Earl Boogie Band. That year Earl played alongside his drummer brother Roger on the debut album by Foghat: he later appeared on their last US hit Third Time Lucky (First Time I Was A Fool) in 1979, and on the band's *Last Train Home* LP in 2010. He also served as their road manager in 1973. Earl, who rejoined

Mungo Jerry for gigs and recording from 1975 to 1980, also played in the John Dummer Blues Band and later re-formed the King Earl Boogie Band.

Ian Harrison

## Chris Jasper

Soulful all-rounder

BORN 1951

FROM CINCINNATI, Chris Jasper played classical piano and studied at the Juilliard School Of Music. In 1973 his group with brothers Ernie and Marvin Isley, The Jazzmen Trio, were absorbed into the latter pair's older siblings' group The Isley Brothers. This turned the erstwhile R&B vocal outfit into a self-contained unit playing funk and slow jams; Jasper, influenced by Debussy and Ravel, brought a lushness to ballads including 1975's For The Love Of You (from US Number 1 LP *The Heat Is On*), and utilised Moog, clavinet and synths to give social statements like US Number 4 hit Fight The Power a rumbling unease. In 1984, the group splintered and Jasper, Ernie and Marvin formed Isley-Jasper-Isley. Their second LP, 1985's

Power broker:  
Chris Jasper drove  
Isley-Jasper-Isley's  
Caravan Of Love.



*Caravan Of Love*, yielded the US R&B Number 1 single title track; in 1986, The Housemartins hit UK Number 1 with their a cappella version. In 1987, a solo Jasper

founded the Gold City label and continued to perform and record up to his death. His most recent single was 2024's Be Number One.

Lois Wilson

## THEY ALSO SERVED

### SENEGALISE GUITARIST JIMI MBAYE

(b.1957) made his Stratocaster sound like a traditional ngoni or kora. He built his first guitar by stringing fishing line over a bin, and, aged 20, met **Yousouf N'Dour** on the Dakar club scene. They formed **Le Super Étoile De Dakar** in 1981. N'Dour's band ever since, and also toured as an acoustic duo. In between, Mbaye released five solo albums and ran Studio Dogo, which hosted musicians including **Steve Reid** for 2007's LP *Daxaar*.

FALSETTO-AND-BEYOND SINGER **ROBERT JOHN** (above, b.1946) had his first US chart entry aged 12 with White Bucks And Saddle Shoes. In 1972 he hit US Number 3 with his version of The Lion Sleeps Tonight; seven years later, on EMI America, he reached US Number 1 with Sad Eyes. He was also briefly signed to Motown, and co-wrote songs recorded by **Blood, Sweat & Tears**, **Gene Pitney** and **Lou Rawls**.

EASYBEATS DRUMMER **SNOWY FLEET** (b.Gordon Fleet, 1939) played with the British-Dutch-Australian group from 1964

to 1967. Born in Liverpool and active on the Merseybeat scene, he reputedly named the band. Relocating to London in '66, they recorded their international smash Friday On My Mind. Unhappy spending time away from his family, Fleet left after 1967's



Good Friday to work in construction, but returned for a 1986 band reunion.

ENGINEER and producer **DAVE JERDEN** (b.1949) first came to notice as a mixer and engineer on **Talking Heads'** 1980 LP *Remain In Light*. In the years that followed he would work on records including **Eno & Byrne's** *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*, **Herbie Hancock's** *Future Shock* and **The Rolling Stones'** *Dirty Work*, plus LPs by **Tom Verlaine**, **Frank Zappa**, **Jane's Addiction**, **PiL** and **Alice In Chains**.

SESSION GUITARIST, bassist and songwriter **ALBERT 'JUNIOR' LOWE** (b.1940) worked at the legendary FAME Studios, wellspring of the Muscle Shoals sound, in his hometown of Florence, Alabama.

A regular member of **The Fame Gang** for 11

years, he played on hits including **Wilson Pickett's** Land Of 1,000 Dances and **When A Man Loves A Woman** by **Percy Sledge** (both 1966). In the '70s, Lowe concentrated on songwriting: interpreters included **Hank Williams Jr** and **Little Richard**, in whose band Lowe later toured.

EAST LONDON GRIME producer **TERROR DANJAH** (b.Rodney Pryce, c.1980) came from a reggae, soul and R&B background and formed junglist collective **Reckless Crew** in 1998. Via UK garage and **N.A.S.T.Y. Crew** he began making waves on the grime scene with tracks punctuated by his cackling audio signature 'The Gremlin' on his After Shock label from 2003. Releases followed on Planet Mu, Hyperdub and Tru Thoughts, as well as his own Hardrive imprint. He also collaborated with **Four Tet**, **Kano** and **Zed Bias**, among others. In 2019 he suffered a stroke.

SOUL SINGER **TOMMY HUNT** (below, b.1933) joined Chicago doo woppers **The Flamingos** in 1956 and sang on their 1959 US Number 11 hit I Only Have Eyes For You. Departing to go solo, he had a US Top 50 hit with 1961 45

Human. In the '70s he was resident in Britain and playing the Northern soul circuit, scoring UK Top 40 hits with Crackin' Up and Loving On The Losing Side. He continued to perform into his late eighties and was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall Of Fame in 2001. He died in Pontefract.

GRAPHIC DESIGNER **DAVID BYRD** (b.1941) was hired by **Bill Graham** to produce psychedelic posters for shows by **Jimi Hendrix**, the **Dead**, **Janis Joplin** and many more at New York's Fillmore East from 1968 to 1973. Byrd also designed for the **Stones**, **The Who** and **Kiss**; his record covers included **Lou Reed's** 1974 LP *Sally Can't Dance*. He also designed for Broadway shows and worked as an illustrator for Warner Bros.

HIP-HOP MAGNATE and producer **IRV GOTTI** (b.1970) DJ'd in Queens and was a talent scout for Def Jam, signing **DMX** to the label. In 1998 he co-founded Murder Inc Records and had chart success with **Ja Rule**, **Ashanti** and **Jennifer Lopez**. He also worked with **Kanye West**, **Mary J Blige** and **Fat Joe**, and later

developed TV shows.

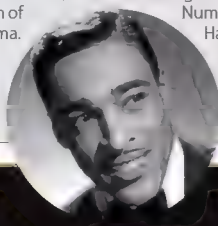
MANAGER, music publisher and collaborator **JANE MCGARRIGLE** (below, b.1941) worked closely with her singing siblings **Kate & Anna McGarrigle** from their self-titled 1976 debut onwards. She regularly produced, wrote and performed with them; their co-written *Love Is* was later covered by **Emmylou Harris**. Jane also co-authored joint memoir *Mountain City Girls* in 2015, the same year she played piano on *Songs In The Dark* by **The Wainwright Sisters**, the group formed by her niece Martha and her half-sister Lucy.



**SONICS** DRUMMER **BOB BOOM-BOOM BENNETT**

(b.c.1947) battered his kit into submission with the Tacoma proto-punks, appearing on incendiary debut *Here Are The Sonics* (1965) and its follow-up *Boom* (1966). After the band's demise in 1968, Bennett played on a 1972 reunion later released as *Live Fanz Only* and guested at a Seattle show in 2008, but sat out future re-formations in favour of watching the band play.

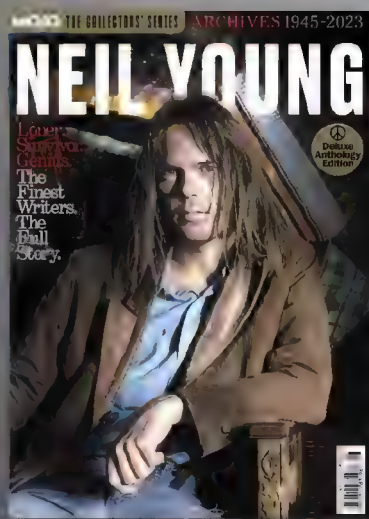
Jenny Bulley and Ian Harrison



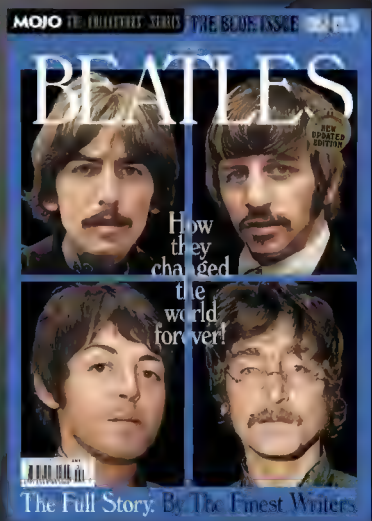
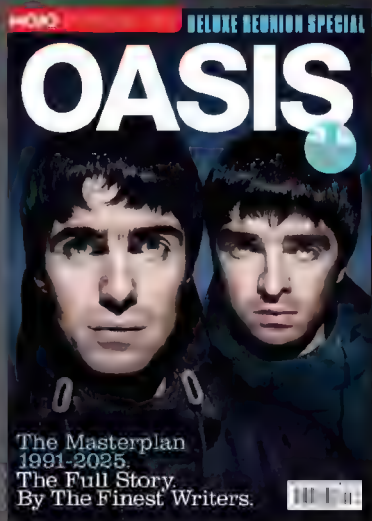


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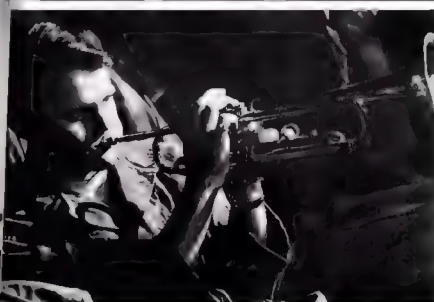
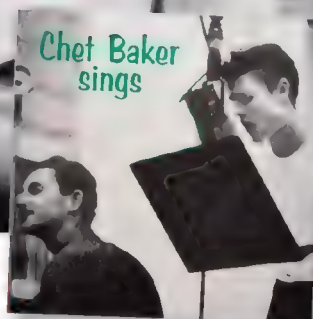








Blue Valentine: (clockwise from main) Chet Baker recording in Los Angeles, 1954; Baker blowing his trumpet in 1955 US war film *Hell's Horizon*; debut vocal album *Chet Baker Sings*.



## APRIL 1954 ...Chet Baker Sings

**APRIL 2** The post-war era was really starting to swing. Today, the construction of Disneyland was announced, and the price of America's first mass-produced colour TV set was reduced. Simultaneously, America had just tested their largest-ever nuclear bomb and President Dwight D Eisenhower was preparing his "domino theory" outlining America's fears of international communism. Meanwhile, as reported in *DownBeat*, California trumpeter Chet Baker was in the midst of a two-week engagement at the Basin Street jazz club on Times Square, with pianist Russ Freeman.

Six weeks earlier in Hollywood, the two and producer Dick Bock from the Pacific Jazz label had recorded the trumpeter's first vocal LP, *Chet Baker Sings*. "It is startling to discover a voice and a horn of such quality with but a single source," promised the sleeve notes on the double-7-inch/10-inch album released this month. "Perhaps you'll hear an echo of that tender horn in the soft voice singing, moving delicately from word to word and note to note..."

Reportedly taking the singer dozens of takes for each song, the album would become Baker's best-known work. Featuring compositions by the Gershwins, Hoagy Carmichael and Sammy Cahn,

its cool softness had little to do with jazz extemporisation. Instead, Baker gently conducted the listener through linear, bittersweet ballads of love going wrong and sometimes right, in an intimate, vulnerable croon.

His poignant version of Rodgers and Hart's *My Funny Valentine* became his calling card. He'd previously cut it as an instrumental in '53 with saxophonist Gerry Mulligan, who called Baker "maybe the most gifted trumpeter with whom I ever played or ever heard." Quoted in James Gavin's compelling biography *Deep In A Dream: The Long Night Of Chet Baker*, Freeman later called the album "bullshit... meaningless". *Billboard* critiqued Baker's

lukewarm: *Billboard* referred to his "unemotional and limited vocal technique." *DownBeat* was more positive, but argued, "never... is there any exultancy."

Even so, Baker's star was rising. The previous year he'd split from Mulligan's Quartet, and in that year's *DownBeat* poll he'd beaten Miles Davis as critics' and readers' top trumpeter. His photogenic, James Dean-plays-jazz good looks provoked talk of a movie career. The Martin Band Instrument Co even ran ads where Baker was illustrated as an inspirational paragon of hard work and offered "reprints for school bulletin boards."

Yet the distracted slowness of the album and Baker's rather glassy delivery, it could be argued, suggested something else. The truth was, Baker had a weakness for drugs. He'd first been busted for weed on his 23rd birthday in 1952, and was arrested with Mulligan in April '53 (the latter took the rap). Freeman, who'd quit his own four-year habit after OD'ing on speedballs in '52 after working with fellow dope fiend Art Pepper, was quoted by biographer Jeroen De Valk as saying that Baker and hard drugs met in late 1954. "He was so irrational," said the pianist, who quit the operation in '55. "Chet was also the only guy who continued so long while other junkies either quit or died."

In his posthumous mini-memoir *As Though I Had Wings*, Baker tied his slide into heroin and cocaine to trips to Europe in 1955

**"I was very naïve about getting strung out on stuff."**  
CHET BAKER



and 1956. "At this point I was very naïve about getting strung out on stuff," he wrote. "Paris was full of people using." One was his pianist Dick Twardzik, who OD'd in Paris in September '55 (Baker wrote, dispassionately, "the hotel manager had broken the door open and found Dick bright blue, the spike still in his arm.")

Rather than a time of consolidation, the rest of the 1950s saw events spiral out of control. With increased attention from the law, he tried rehab – remarking on how many musicians he knew in the same boat in Lexington Federal Hospital – but failed, and recalled nodding out at Harlem dealer Dirty Nick's apartment "only to wake up with cockroaches crawling all over me." That decade and into the next, he spent jail time on Rikers Island and in Italy, and at one point was given six months to live.

Somehow, he kept it together. In the years that followed he recorded prolifically for multiple labels and toured widely, even navigating a 1968 incident when a San Francisco drug deal went wrong and he had his teeth knocked out, wrecking his embouchure. He lost his looks to drugs, but outran the straight life – until May 13, 1988, when he fell from the second storey of the Prins Hendrik Hotel in Amsterdam. With unfortunate timing, Bruce Weber's dream-like film portrait *Let's Get Lost* arrived four months later.

Of course, Baker sang *My Funny Valentine* until the end. "If I hadn't been a trumpet player, I don't know if I would have arrived at singing that way," he once wondered. "I probably wouldn't have."

Ian Harrison



Ain't misbehavin': Ol' Blue Eyes swings easy in '54.

## Sinatra Swings Back

**APRIL 19** Having just won an Oscar for his performance in

*From Here To Eternity*, Frank Sinatra completes the second recording date for his *Swing Easy!* album at Capitol Studios in Hollywood. It's his first collaboration with arranger Nelson Riddle and shows the singer in revitalised light. At the time he was also moving on from his tempestuous marriage to Ava Gardner, of whom Riddle commented, "Ava taught him how to sing a torch song... she taught him the hard way." In other news, on April 23 NME reports that Sinatra's lawyers have issued a writ for libel against John Mills of the Milroy Club, London and the publishers of the *Sunday Express* over reports of misbehaviour in August 1953.



Let Rattle be joined: (left) Bill Haley and Big Joe Turner start the revolution.



## HALEY ROCKS, BIG JOE ROLLS

**APRIL 12** Bill Haley & His Comets record *Rock Around The Clock* at NY's Pythian Temple studio with Louis Jordan producer Milt Gabler. The band arrive late and spend most of the session on single flipside *Thirteen Women* and only manage two takes of *Rock Around The Clock*. It's enough, and the condensed burst of rock'n'-

roll electricity is a global smash and is picked up by director Richard Brooks for his 1955 movie *Blackboard Jungle*. This month blues shouter Big Joe Turner releases *Shake, Rattle & Roll*, which hits US R&B Number 1 and 22 on the pop charts; in June, Haley and band cover it and reach US Number 7/UK Number 4. A young Elvis Presley records it in '55.

### ALSO ON!



#### DORIS: PARTIAL

**9** Doris Day's (above) musical *Lucky Me* is released. Unimpressed with the script, she has panic attacks throughout production. Her movie single *I Speak To The Stars* hits US Number 16 and peaks at UK Number 1 on April 16.

#### HI, CRY GUY

**12** Johnnie Ray appears on The BBC Show Band Show on the Light Programme. The singer's currently touring Britain: his April 5 London show is later released as *Live At The Palladium*, while on April 30 he hits UK Number 1 with *Such A Night*.

#### RIP LIL GREEN

**14** R&B star Lil Green dies in Chicago. Her biggest songs were her own *Romance In The Dark* and her cover of Kansas Joe McCoy's *Why Don't You Do Right?* which Peggy Lee later covers.

#### D'YE KEN

**18** Ken Colyer's Jazzman and Skiffle Group play London's Royal Festival Hall. Chris Barber, Lonnie Donegan and Monty Sunshine appear.

#### GOOD EVENING BLUES

**25** The Theatre Royal, Stratford, hosts the *Ballads & Blues Show* of UK and US folk. It's organised by Ewan MacColl, who has been under MIS surveillance for far-left activity including his 78 release *The Ballad Of Stalin*.

### TOP TEN

#### US R&B JUKEBOX SINGLES APRIL 17

**1** **THINGS THAT I USED TO DO** GUITAR SLIM SPECIALTY

**2** **SUCH A NIGHT** CLYDE McPHATTER ATLANTIC

**3** **SAVING MY LOVE FOR YOU** JOHNNY ACE DUKE

**4** **I'M YOUR HOOCHIE COOCHEE MAN** MUDDY WATERS CHESS

**5** **LOVEY DOVEY** THE CLOVERS ATLANTIC

**6** **YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE** ROY HAMILTON EPIC

**7** **MARIE THE FOUR TONES** JUBILEE

**8** **LITTLE MAMA** THE CLOVERS ATLANTIC

**9** **IT SHOULD'VE BEEN ME** RAY CHARLES ATLANTIC

**10** **I DIDN'T WANT TO DO IT** THE SPIDERS IMPERIAL



On the 'box: Ray Charles hits Number 9.

### AD ARCHIVE 1954



As saluted in song by Belle And Sebastian, a push-along dog (or a donkey) on wheels was the acme of pre-school entertainment in '54.





## Who hid Easter eggs on CD?

Let us answer your nagging rock'n'roll queries and shed light on musical mystery.

In our renewed love of vinyl we tend to forget the pleasant surprises of the digital age. On John Cale's *HoboSapiens* there was an excellent hidden track if you reworded the CD beyond its starting point. Arcade Fire did something similar on *Reflektor*. On *Kid A*, Radiohead hid an additional booklet with artwork inside the tray itself. Are there any other examples of such Easter eggs for the initiated only?

*Sander Out, The Netherlands*

**MOJO says:** There were a lot of mystery tracks hidden on disc in the 1990s and '00s. Novel rewind-the-CD "pre-gap" songs include Me, White Noise from *Think Tank* by hidden-track repeat offenders Blur, Arab Strap's version of Ben Kenobi's Theme on their Cherubs EP and Sly & Robbie's cover of Madonna's La Isla Bonita on their *Late Night Tales* mix; Super Furry Animals did it with unlisted tune The Citizens Band off *Guerrilla*, and added to the fun by including a guide to said track hidden in a secret flap you had to rip open on the card sleeve. But the most popular spot for phantom songs was at the end of the album: celebrated examples include Nirvana's Endless, Nameless (appearing 10 minutes after *Nevermind* officially ended), Paul Weller adding a new version of unreleased Jam song No One In The World to all-star Jam covers comp *Fire & Skill*, and Tom Waits' beatbox-tastic Chick A Boom, the unlisted closing track of *Real Gone*. Beck is another true believer, adding bonus audio to LPs including *Mellow Gold*, *Odelay* and *Mutations*, whose secret number Diamond Bollocks surely deserves a mention, while Teddy Thompson hid light under a bushel with concealed duets of the Everly Brothers with Emmylou Harris, his mum Linda and Ed Harcourt on



his '00s albums. The list goes on, on albums by names including Ramones, Oasis, Queens Of The Stone Age, the Manics and The Stone Roses, whose dribbling bonus cut The Foz from their *Second Coming* LP may unwittingly illustrate their mindset during the long years they spent making it. As for secret CD sleeve art, Kiss tribute *Kiss My A\*\** featured thanks from Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons to Ace Frehley and Peter Dinklage hidden underneath the CD tray, Bowie's *Blackstar* had an invisible star field that appeared when illuminated, and Pet Shop Boys' *Very* had a hidden insert and the short hidden track Postscript (I Believe In Ecstasy), which was sung by Chris Lowe. Anyway, which hidden songs and mysterious sleeve plays can you add?

### SWINDLE SINGERS

Re: Auditioning for the Sex Pistols film... I was in a useless punk group, The Unwanted. The singer Olli Wisdom (Specimen, Space Tribe and the man who invented goth with The Batcave club) went to the audition and was filmed. I'm not sure if he ended up in the final cut. Olli is no longer with us. God rest his soul!

*David Lynch, via e-mail*

**MOJO says:** We're pretty sure Olli didn't make it into the audition section of *The Great Rock 'N' Roll Swindle* movie – but who did? Someone out there must know!

### WONDER WHO THEY WERE

I have a 1969 gig poster for the Straight Theatre in San Francisco – the MC5 top the bill and Clover are on third, in between are The Congress Of Wonders who I have never heard of – what's their story?

*Al Tutt, Chicago*

**MOJO says:** Called by Cash Box, "court jesters to



It's better to conceal than reveal: (clockwise from above left) Nirvana had a hidden track on *Nevermind*; Bo Diddley (far right) with maracas king Jerome Green (front); The Congress Of Wonders' *Revolting*; Batcave co-founder and Specimen singer Olli Wisdom.

the San Francisco music community", The Congress Of Wonders were a comedy group from the Bay Area. Mainmen Winslow Thrill (Richard Rollins) and Karl Truckload (Howard Kerr) met at the University of California drama department and recorded *Revolting* (1970) and *Sophomoric* (1972), satirising the straights and the subculture with fake ads, funny voices and stoner in-jokes. It seems both have gone on to the great beyond, but the laughs remain: see 1970's Pigeon Park, which depicts the Dead's Jerry Garcia and Phil Lesh as senior citizens in an imagined future when drugs are legal, still sticking it to The Man.

### HELP MOJO

Last week I saw The Brian Jonestown Massacre at Nijmegen, NL. Singer Anton Newcombe was standing at the side while a guy playing the maracas (and occasionally tambourine) was centre stage. Are there other examples of bands with a member playing exclusively maracas or tambourine? I could only think of [maracas man] Jerome Green who played with Bo Diddley.

*Kostas Evmorfiadis, Delft*

**MOJO says:** Jerome Green was a master of the maracas, but which rhythmic minimalists followed in his wake, apart from BJM man Joel Gion? They also sang/dance/other, but on-the-clock maracas players include Ray Sawyer from Dr Hook, Afro-Cuban jazzer Machito and Bez from Happy Mondays. Tambourine players, meanwhile, include Jack Ashford of The Funk Brothers (on no end of Motown hits), early Primal Scream member The Joogs, and Bruce Langhorne, the inspiration for Mr Tambourine Man (he was, of course, a multi-instrumentalist). Anyone?

### CONTACT MOJO

Have you got a challenging musical question for the MOJO Brains Trust? E-mail [askmojo@bauermedia.co.uk](mailto:askmojo@bauermedia.co.uk) and we'll help untangle your trickiest puzzles.





# Situationists Vacant

Win! Three Sex Pistols live-in-'78 albums and tasty T-shirts.

**W**HEN THE Sex Pistols split messily on-stage at the Winterland in San Francisco on January 14, 1978, Johnny Rotten famously declared, "Ever get the feeling you've been cheated?" Earlier on that night, he'd also told the crowd, "I think it's fun. Do you want your ears blown out some more?"

This year three limited-edition live LPs from that infamous US tour allow listeners to re-experience the Pistols live. Three volumes of *Sex Pistols – Live In The USA 1978* present

the San Francisco gig (on blue vinyl) plus shows at the Longhorn Ballroom, Dallas (on white vinyl) and the Great South East Music Hall, Atlanta (on red vinyl). The sounds are newly mastered and come clad in familiar Pistols livery. The first vinyl (Atlanta) is released on March 28, with the others to follow at monthly intervals. They'll also be available on CD and digital on April 25.

We have FOUR sets to give away, plus stylish official Pistols T-shirts! To get in with a chance to win, complete the crossword and take the letters from each coloured square and rearrange them to form the name of a musician. Visit [www.mojo4music.com/crossword](http://www.mojo4music.com/crossword) and fill out the form, along with your answer, in the provided field. Entry is free and closes at midnight on **June 2, 2025**. Winners are selected at random. For the rules of the quiz, see [www.mojo4music.com](http://www.mojo4music.com).

## ANSWERS

### MOJO 376

**Across:** 1 Jonathan Richman, 9 California Girls, 10 Morphine, 12 Andromeda, 14 Eon, 15 Gristle, 16 Gift, 18 Kylie, 19 Chess, 20 Rise, 21 Valotte, 22 Ren, 23 Earth, 26 Pye, 28 EP, 30 Zither, 31 Weirdo, 32 Orion, 33 Skyscraper, 37 Commodores, 39 ELO, 40 Eastenders, 41 Steinway, 42 IRS, 45 Tiff, 48 Yod, 49 Olympia, 50 Ital, 51 War, 52 Pentangle, 55 Labelle, 56 Rodney Smith.

**Down:** 1 Jaco Pastorius, 2 Nellie Luther, 3 Toffee, 4 Adrian Belew, 5 Rain Dogs, 6 Cage Of Freedom, 7 Murder, 8 Noreaga, 11 Our Man, 13 Idiot, 17 Tin, 18 Keep On Dancin', 24 Railroad, 25 Honest, 26 Prophecy, 27 Wilco, 29 Respect, 34 Yusuf, 35 Clem, 36 Residents, 38 Meek Mill, 43 Soca, 44 Vortex, 46 Tiger, 47 Naked, 51 Wild, 52 Pie, 53 Nut, 54 Eat.

**Anagram:** Poly Styrene

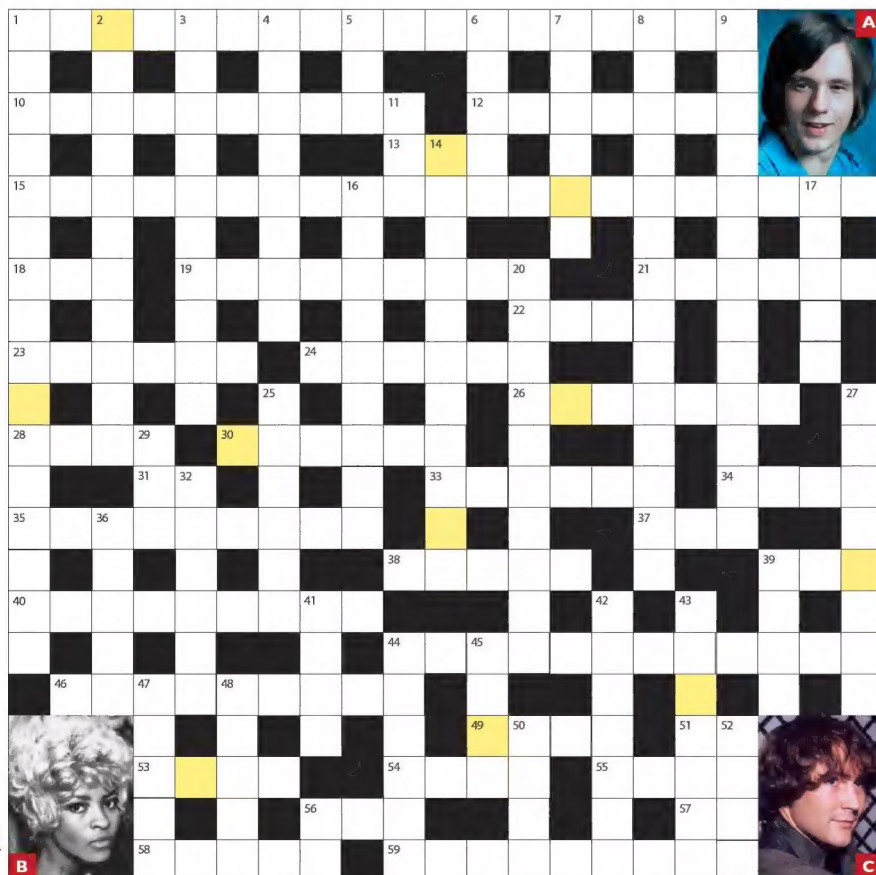
**374 Winner:** Stef Johnson wins a GO Bar Kensei DAC from iFi Audio.

### CLUES 378

- 1 See photo clue A (4,11,3)
- 10 Tom Jans song first covered by Kris Kristofferson and Rita Coolidge in 1973 (6,4)
- 12 Joe Cocker sings Van, Stevie, Dylan, himself... (7)
- 13 Davy Graham's sombrero special? (3)
- 15 They hit big with It's Good News Week in 1965 (12,9)
- 18 Shut Up 'N Play --- Guitar (Zappa) (3)
- 19 Stevie Wonder track whose 12-inch mix sampled Ronald Reagan and Oliver North (9)
- 21 Freudian song title used by Lennon, Pink Floyd, The Police (6)
- 22 Faith No More's breakthrough hit of 1990 (4)
- 23 NYC noise rockers whose unreleased debut LP was *Improvised Munitions* (6)
- 24 Nico heads to ancient Egypt with The ----- (6)
- 26 Bo Diddley's man Jerome played them (7)
- 28 Robert Palmer said some of them had all the luck (4)
- 30 When Right Said Fred's streak of hits stopped in '93 (6)
- 31 All-female no wavers formed in NY in 1978 (2)
- 33 Madonna keeping shtum on the lead single from *Bedtime Stories*? (6)
- 34 Cabaret Voltaire and Adrian Sherwood meet in 1987 (4)
- 35 Smalls-related B-side to Pulp's *Common People* (9)
- 37 UK metal reissue label for Girlschool, Samson, Heep etc (1,1,1)
- 38 Mr Mister's 1986 hit --- in Greek (5)
- 39 Tormé, Gillis or Collins (3)
- 40 Beloved entertainer, middle name Hercules (5,4)
- 44 Fairport drummer and noted session player (4,8)
- 46 See photo clue B (4,5)
- 49 Underground tape label who released *New York Thrashin' '82* (4)
- 51 Missy Higgins's all-Australian covers LP (2)
- 53 Atoms For Peace's sole LP so far (4)
- 54 Who fronts The Sniffers? (4)
- 55 Eat's Mr Dolittle (1,1)
- 56 1960 Anthony Newley Number 1, previously sung by Frankie Avalon (3)
- 57 Nelly's follow-up to *Country Grammar* (*Hot Shot*) (1,1)
- 58 Rory Gallagher's blues rockers from Cork (5)
- 59 The dub producer who's met Pac-Man and the Space Invaders and rid *The World Of The Evil Curse Of The Vampires* (9)

### DOWN

- 1 Mott The Hoople's biggest hit, thanks to Bowie (3,3,5,5)
- 2 See photo clue C (5,6)
- 3 Chicago House pioneers formed by Larry Heard and Robert Owens (7,3)
- 4 *Beatles For Sale* song whose narrator confesses, "I'm not what I appear to be." (2,1,5)
- 5 Rutle John Halsey's alias Barry --- (3)
- 6 He led The Maytals (5)
- 7 Kelly, Record or Chadbourne? (6)
- 8 The 25th Of May's politically punning debut LP (5,1,8)
- 9 Ultravox's declaration on entering the party? (2,4,2,5)
- 11 "If you would let me love you/I wouldn't be the same." (Marianne Faithfull) (3)
- 14 Guitarist with The Lounge Lizards, The Golden Palominos and Ambitious Lovers (4,7)
- 16 Bob & Marcia and Crispian St Peters both had hits with this title (4,5)
- 17 Bill Withers hit covered by Grace Jones, G.W.A.R. and Scott Walker (3,2)
- 20 1970 James Brown "live-in-the-studio" album with dubbed applause (3,7)
- 25 Nick Cave song about the birth of Elvis (6)
- 27 AKA 'The Only Band That Matters' (3,5)
- 29 Juggy Murray's label playing 'The Sound Of Soul' (3)
- 32 Dance music style as played by Robert Miles, Paul Oakenfold, John Digweed etc (6)
- 36 The Gossip's Beth ----- (5)
- 39 Paris, Levi or Townsend (4)
- 41 What Eddie Bo twinned with a Sling (4)
- 42 Hollywood glam metallers whose biggest success was *Cherry Pie* in 1990 (7)
- 43 Iggy's backing group The ----- (7)
- 44 Southampton indie band who hit with *Faded Seaside Glamour* in 2004 (6)
- 45 Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown and Milt Jackson played as The ----- Tall Band (4)
- 47 They went Top 10 with Roobarb And Custard in '91 (5)
- 48 Power-poppers piloted by John and Jeff Murphy (5)
- 50 Paul Weller said it best on The ----- Original (4)
- 52 Tangerine Dream reflect on matters temporal in 1972 (4)
- 56 Arcade Fire's last album to date (2)







**Foregone conclusion:** the 'final' Guided By Voices line-up, 2004 (from left) Robert Pollard, Nate Farley, Chris Slusarenko, Doug Gillard, Kevin March.

# Robert Pollard and Guided By Voices

It began with a bar band and smashed records, and ended on a bittersweet New Year's Eve in Chicago.

## HELLO C.1980

It actually began somewhere in the mid to late '70s and came out of a lame arena rock covers bar band called Anacrusis, which means to start a song on the upbeat. I guess most songs start on the downbeat. The symbol for the term was an upside-down 'u' with a period in the middle. So I put a lightning bolt through it and made it our logo. A little to our credit, we did do Alice Cooper and Aerosmith and so many Cheap Trick songs, one could call us a Cheap Trick cover band. I seriously considered calling ourselves Fat Chance.

So anyway, Mitch Mitchell and I bailed, or maybe we got kicked out, in 1978 or '79, because we started getting into punk rock or, more specifically for me, post-punk. We went through various names: We've Got Airplanes, Beethoven And The American Flag, Instant Lovelies, Ape Shit, Acid Ranch... until I finally decided on a name or title I had written down in a notebook, Guided By Voices.

That stuck because it's a good name but we really were, as of yet, clueless. We had no real identity. At first we were pseudo garage psychedelic, and then later, around '84 or so, an R.E.M. clone. Not really a clone,

because a clone of a great band should be somewhat 'good', and that we were not.

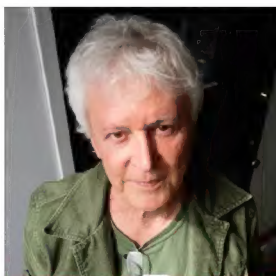
I decided to scrap the jangly guitar and Michael Stipe rip and took on more of a British accent, because I thought it sounded better and still do. We went through a few changes with different line-ups and at some point I realised no one outside of the band really cared. We were sitting on a thousand copies of [1986 debut release] *Forever Since Breakfast* – we couldn't even give them away, and one night Mitch and I threw and smashed against the wall about two dozen copies.

So I made the decision to make an album with exactly what I wanted on it, ignoring any current standards in quality or sound fidelity. Some 8-track recordings, live basement recordings, field recordings, noise, whatever, as long as I was amused.

## GOODBYE DEC 31, 2004

Most people interested know the rest of the evolution. Getting signed by Scat and then

Matador, record releases, band member changes, more label changes... at some point in 2003 or 2004 I decided it would be a good time to wrap it up. I don't know. I thought that maybe as a group identity with a name that had become somewhat of a brand, it may have run its course. I also thought I could try to do a Peter Gabriel and go it alone. There was no falling out or anything. No disgruntlement, insubordination or lack of enthusiasm. I just wanted to test a different chemistry or approach.



**"I thought I could try to do a Peter Gabriel and go it alone."**

ROBERT POLLARD

I called everyone together and told them the plan. I'm not sure everyone was completely happy about it but they accepted it. We then recorded our last album at that stage [*Half Smiles Of The Decomposed*] and took it on tour.

We decided on a final show in Chicago and to call it 'The Electrifying Conclusion' after a lyric from an early GBV song. We set our sights on about a three- to three-and-a-half-hour show and decided to invite past members of the various incarnations to join us on-stage for songs from their respective eras, and had an old friend that goes by Trader Vic set up a portable bar and serve us drinks on-stage. [Bassist] Greg Demos showed up with his wife, Rosie, who asked me, "What did you say you're calling the show?" and I said, "The Electrifying Conclusion." And she said, "Whatever..." I agreed but I also somehow knew it wasn't gonna be the end.

I recall it actually being bittersweet if not somewhat over-dramatic, but I think most people enjoyed it and look back fondly on the entire affair. The next day on New Year's Day 2005, after recovering from the hangover, I was able to reflect on everything, put it all into perspective, and do what I had decided to do: release a double solo album, form a new touring band and see if I could help it successfully take off the way Guided By Voices did in the early 1990s.

*Guided By Voices' Universe Room is out now on GBV Inc.*



**Vocal hero:** Pollard during the early GBV "clueless" years; (left) Robert today.





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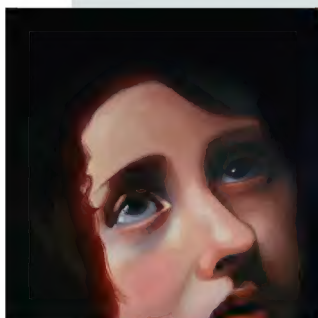
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**DIA**



**Bonnie 'Prince' Billy**  
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**Richard Dawson**  
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